

Vytautė Žilinskaitė

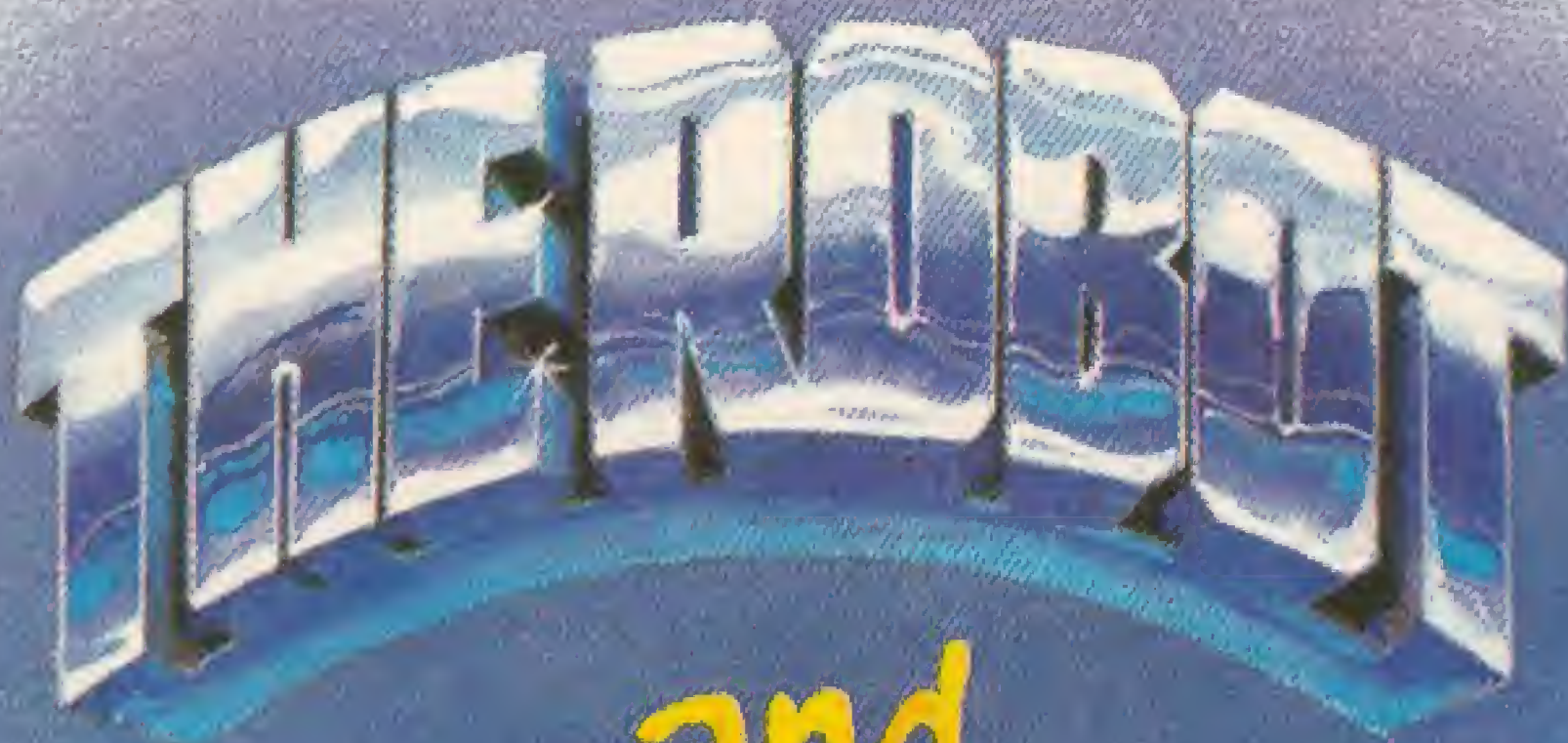
THE ROBOT

AND

the Moth



Vytautė Žilinskaitė



and

the Moth

TALES



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В. Жилинскайте
РОБОТ И БАБОЧКА
На английском языке

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Tales, Old and New



Do you like fairy tales? But of course you do, or you wouldn't be opening this book. What is a fairy tale? A story about something that cannot be? A mere fantasy? A piece of invention? Not really. You take a fairy tale very much to heart, laughing at the hero's funny adventures or trembling with fear when he finds himself in deadly peril, and maybe even crying. But you simply must hear it to the end. And then there are your favourite tales, which you want to hear over and over again, and when you learn to read, you read them many times over.

Now, who composed the fairy tales? What for? Who for? In times long past, when there were no printed books, when people could not even write because they had not invented the alphabet yet, they already composed fairy tales and told them to one another.

There were no schools in those days, and fairy tales were a kind of school, teaching people to be brave and kind, industrious and truthful. Fairy tales not only helped man to survive, but showed him how to fight evil, how to protect the weak, help the poor and punish the greedy. They gave a child faith in his strength and pride in being a human being... A little girl, on becoming old, would tell them to her grandchildren, and those, in their turn, to theirs, and so the tales were passed, by word of mouth, from one generation to another. And each time grains of the teller's own experience would be added to the fairy tale, and it would be enriched by the newest discoveries of Man's inquisitive mind.

Of course, somebody had to tell the very first fairy tale. But because it happened many thousands of years ago, we do not know his name. So tales whose authors are unknown are called folk tales, and every nation has a stock of them. But we do know the names of many tale-tellers who lived nearer our own time, Hans Christian Andersen, Charles Perrault, the Grimm brothers, Alexander Pushkin, Wilhelm Hauff, Rudyard Kipling, Selma Lagerlöf, Antony Pogorelsky, Lewis Carroll and Alan Milne. Their tales have been translated into hundreds of languages and are known the world over. Today tales travel fast. You can not only hear one from your kind Grannie, but read in a book, see on TV, in the cinema or at the theatre. And today even your younger brother knows that books are written by writers and that every nation has its own writers of fairy tales.

Well, the book you're holding in your hands was written by the authoress Vytautė Žilinskaitė, who lives in Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania, a republic on the coast of the Baltic Sea, in the western part of the Soviet Union. Lithuanians, who live here, are an ancient nation and have preserved

many old songs, legends and tales. Their scholars have written down more than 300 thousand folk songs, which are called *dainas*. Can you imagine it? A thousand big books would be needed just to print them all. Lithuanians are so very fond of their folklore, that they have put up monuments to some of the heroes of their fairy tales—the kindly giantess Neringa, Eglė the Queen of Grass-snakes, the sea princess Jūratė... Still, new times bring new tales. And so Lithuanian children read not only the tales of ancient times that have reached them over the ages, but also modern ones composed by Vytautė Žilinskaitė. In them they find many things which were never mentioned in the old tales simply because they did not exist at that time, things like TV sets, robots, or refrigerator trucks rolling along paved motorways.

Shall I tell you some more about Vytautė Žilinskaitė? To begin with, don't imagine that she is a gray-haired grannie. Not at all. She is a modern woman with a good sense of humour. She drives her own car, is fond of travel and types her fairy tales on an electric typewriter. She writes both prose and poetry, humorous stories and serious novels, and plays for the theatre. Žilinskaitė has published many books, and they are known and loved not only in her native Lithuania but all over the Soviet Union and even abroad.

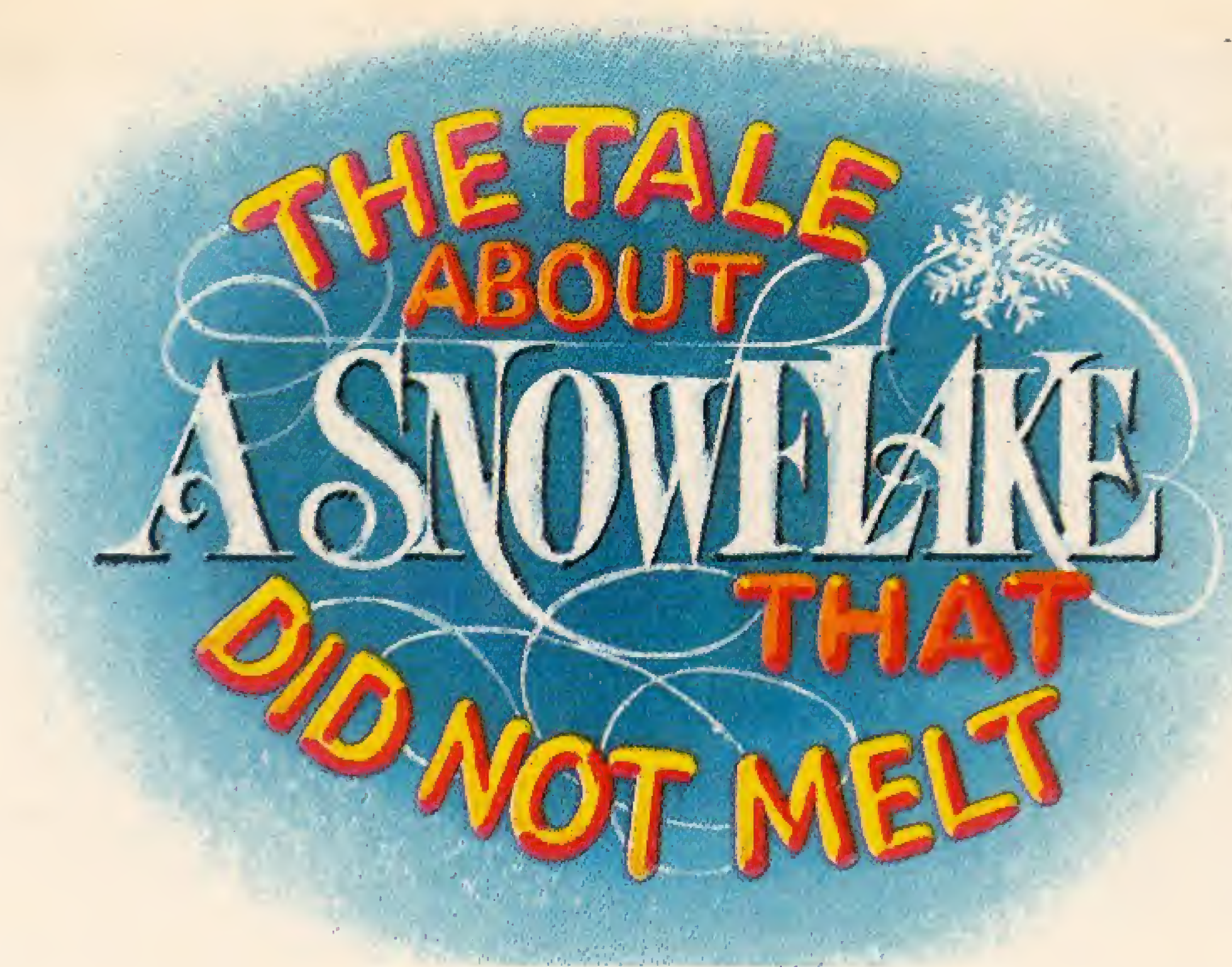
Vytautė Žilinskaitė has a son named Marius. I knew him when he was a little boy, but now he has grown up and is a student of biology. Since childhood Marius was interested in various bugs, butterflies and other insects. When you read the tales in this book you will feel that he infected his mother with his enthusiasm for insects. Or perhaps it was the other way round, perhaps it was the mother's tales that induced Marius to take a closer look at the insect world.

Bugs, worms and butterflies are the heroes of many of Žilinskaitė's tales, which she must have told to her son before she put them down on paper.

Žilinskaitė does not show the life of her heroes as a bed of roses—they know sadness and loss, too, for life is not made of joy alone. Žilinskaitė does not think it right to conceal such things as pain, grief and death from the youthful reader. He must know life for what it is, and he must be aware of the living creatures around him, who also have a right to life and happiness.

Now this is the end of my short introduction. I hope you will enjoy reading these tales as I did.

Georgy Gerasimov



THE TALE ABOUT A SNOWFLAKE THAT DID NOT MELT

A snowflake was floating slowly down from the sky. Spring was on the way, the earth was black and steaming, and this snowfall was probably the last that year. The snowflakes were few but large and handsome, and the one I am going to tell you about was the largest and the handsomest of all.

“Oh!” whispered Snowflake looking down, “how big the earth is and how interesting! It was rather dull, living with Mother Cloud... But what is that? What is going on down there?” Snowflake had noticed that the moment her white sisters reached the earth they melted and disappeared—as though they had never been. Only a dark wet spot remained there for a few seconds, and then it dried.

“Am I, too, fated to melt?” Snowflake cried in dismay, “Shall I, too, disappear? But I don’t want to! I want to live

on this beautiful earth! I have only just seen it for the first time! How cruel fate is!"

So, weeping and wringing her white arms in despair, Snowflake was coming down to earth. What else could she do? From above Mother Cloud listened to her wailing, and her heart was wrung.

"Very well," Mother Cloud said when Snowflake had nearly touched down. "Let your wish be fulfilled. You will not melt, you will remain white and beautiful forever. But don't you ever cry again!"

"No, I'll never shed another tear," Snowflake promised, wiping her eyes.

She landed lightly on the black springtime earth and—oh wonder of wonders!—she did not melt. White and graceful like a ballerina, she stood on her slender legs, looked about her, laughed gaily and tripped across the fields, her ice slippers tap-tapping.

Mother Cloud, meanwhile, flew on eastwards. Snowflakes stopped falling, the sky became clear and blue, and the sun flooded the earth with light. Not a trace was soon left of the snow. Young shoots sprouted everywhere, dandelions lit up their golden lamps, and the first blades of grass rustled in the breeze. A cow walked out into the meadow. She had spent the winter in her cramped shed and was so happy to be free that she kept leaping like a calf and mooing joyfully. Suddenly she caught sight of Snowflake.

"Holy m-m-mackerel!" she cried, popping out her big eyes. "Snow? Why doesn't it m-m-melt?"

Snowflake laughed slyly, even though she was the tiniest bit afraid—after all she had never seen such a big animal before, and it had horns, too.

"M-m-my, m-m-my!" the cow mooed. "Snow m-m-

means winter, and if it's winter in the m-m-meadow, I m-m-may catch cold!" So the cow hurried back into the dark shed.

Snowflake looked mockingly after the cowardly cow and walked on. Soon she reached a highway. She walked along the broad asphalt strip for a very long time, but there was nothing but meadows and woods around. Finally Snowflake caught onto a motorcycle racing past and in this way reached the city.

People here were wearing their summer clothes, and children were eating ice-cream. Snowflake wandered about the streets until she found herself in a big public garden. The trees and bushes had young bright-green leaves, and tulips blossomed in flower-beds. Babies were asleep in their prams, bigger boys and girls were riding tricycles, people were feeding bread-crumbs to pigeons. Snowflake gazed at all this in fascination. "How wonderful it is that Mother Cloud heard my cries and did not let me melt," she thought happily. "Wouldn't it be a pity if I missed all those lovely and interesting things!"

"Look, folks," a pigeon suddenly cried, "A snowflake!"

"Really," the other pigeons said marvelling. "A snowflake that hasn't melted! And how pretty it is!"

The children came running and squatted by Snowflake in puzzlement.

"Perhaps it's made of plastic!" they said to one another. "Or glass? But no, it isn't made of plastic or glass, it's really and truly a snowflake. It will probably melt soon..."

But Snowflake just smiled teasingly. She liked it being the centre of attention, being marvelled at and delighted in. She tripped into the centre of the circle formed by the children, stamped her foot gaily, flung out her slender arms

and began dancing the swift dance of the wind, her feet never touching the ground. The tiny ballerina leaped and whirled over the garden, and the children, and even grown-ups, ran after her, ah'ing and oh'ing delightedly:

"How charming it is! Now wonderful! A real miracle of nature!"

But then evening dusk wrapped the street, and the crowd of Snowflake's admirers melted away. The pigeons hid under the eaves, the children went home to their suppers and bed, and Snowflake remained all alone. She was terribly tired, and her little white heart was thumping in her chest. Really, she deserved rest more than anybody else! But where was she to find shelter for the night? Nearby was a flower-bed with flaming tulips. A tulip will do very well, Snowflake thought and hopped into the biggest flower. It was snug and cosy inside, and Snowflake stretched out blissfully on a velvety red petal.

"Brr," the Tulip shuddered, "how cold you are! See how I'm shivering!"

"I'll just take a nap and get out," Snowflake promised.

"No! No!" the Tulip protested. "I won't have you here. I'll catch my death of cold! Get out at once!"

And it shook its cup so fiercely that Snowflake had no choice but go seek shelter somewhere else.

She stretched out on a long blade of grass.

"What's this now?" cried the blade of grass, rearing. "I've been storing the sun's warmth all day and now I have to freeze like this! I'll wilt at once! Go away!"

Snowflake slipped off the blade of grass fearfully and started walking along the street. She was terribly tired and could barely drag her feet. It was the dead of night, the streets were dark and deserted, and only the street-lamps cast their indifferent bluish light around.

Suddenly Snowflake heard a child crying. She stopped to listen—the crying was coming from one of the windows. Snowflake flew up, peered inside through a chink and then squeezed into the room.

A little boy was sitting in his cot sobbing, calling his Mummy, but she was probably fast asleep and did not hear him. Snowflake felt sorry for the boy. She climbed onto his bed and began turning sommersaults on the blanket. The boy laughed as he watched her antics, and his tears dried.

“La-la-la!” he sang out and stretched his warm pink palm towards Snowflake. She jumped on his palm and the boy pressed her to his cheek, tossed her like a ball and even licked her with the tip of his tongue. He played with Snowflake until he fell asleep. Snowflake also dozed off, snuggling to the boy’s chest and very pleased to have found so warm a shelter.

She was awakened by coughing. The boy coughed so long and loudly that his mother woke up and entered the room. She laid her hand on the boy’s forehead.

“How hot you are!” she said anxiously. She put a thermometer into his mouth and it showed 102°.

Mother rushed to the telephone and called the ambulance. Several minutes later the doctor arrived.

“Pneumonia,” he said after examining the little boy.

“I can’t imagine where he could catch cold,” Mother was muttering in alarm. “It is very warm in the room, and in the evening, when I put him to bed, he was as right as rain.”

“We’ll have to take him to hospital,” the doctor decided.

The boy was put on a stretcher and carried out to the ambulance car. His cot remained empty. Snowflake got out from under the blanket and flew out of the window. She



was very sad—could the little boy have fallen ill because of her?

The city was still asleep. Only one window was lit up—behind the railing on a balcony. A lamp was burning on the desk, and in its light Snowflake could see a grey-haired head bent over a book. She climbed over the railing and tip-toed into the room. An old man was sitting at the desk. He was muttering to himself.

“I feel I haven’t got much longer to live. Still, I have had a good life. I have written many books about the wisdom of the world, about things constantly changing in it and never remaining the same: every flower has to wilt, every star will burn out, every night is followed by morning, and winter snow always melts in the rays of the spring sun... But what is this?”

The old scholar stared at a big white snowflake which was floating down onto his desk.

“Are my eyes deceiving me?” The old man rubbed his eyes, then put back his spectacles and again looked at his desk: yes, a big snowflake of winter-time was perched on one of his thick books. He touched it with his finger—it was icy cold.

“What a strange, unaccountable phenomenon!” he cried. “More than strange... I do not understand... Has the weather turned and the northern wind brought snow into our city?”

He went out onto the balcony and looked around. No, it was warm and dry outside, there was no northern wind and no trace of snow. The scholar returned to his study: a real cold snowflake was sparkling on his desk right under the hot lamp. He was at his wits’ end.

“Incredible!” the scholar sighed. “It appears that there exist snowflakes which do not melt in a warm room and do

not obey the laws of nature. It means my books are all wrong and my life's work has been in vain. Shall I have to die with the knowledge that I was mistaken myself and misled others?" The old man put his withered hands on the desk and lowered his weary head. There was such disappointment and grief in his voice that Snowflake's heart contracted with pity. Guiltily, she edged off the desk and flew out of the little ventilation window.

"Why do I bring people only illness and grief?" she asked herself. "Why?"

Snowflake descended on the ground and made her way into the cellar of the nearby house. There she crawled into a deep dark hole.

"I'll wait for winter here, I don't want to cause any more harm," she decided. "There is nothing else I can do."

It was dark in the hole, and it smelt of damp and mould. A moth or a spider crawled into it from time to time, but feeling Snowflake's icy breath hastened to get away. After a while Snowflake became sick and tired of living all alone in a dark cellar and decided to get out into the light of day.

Summer was at its height in the city. An ice-cream vendor stood beside her cart shouting:

"Here's some delicious cold ice-cream, cream and chocolate!"

Catching a moment when the vendor wasn't looking, Snowflake slipped into the cart. Inside, there were big chunks of ice. Snowflake was overjoyed.

"Sisters," she cried, "how happy I am to see you! You haven't melted either and never will. Oh joy! I am not alone any longer." And she clung to the nearby piece of ice as to her own sister, indeed.

But what was the matter with it! A kind of smoke was

rising from the ice, and the piece was growing thinner every moment, without turning into water. Snowflake stared, and it gradually dawned on her that this must be some freak kind of ice made of gas.

Overcome by despair, she rushed out of the cart. Hot sun was shining with blinding brilliance. Dusty cars sped along the street. Sparrows, weak from heat, surrounded a little puddle, drinking thirstily. People with shopping baskets were hurrying along in an unending stream. Everybody was busy, only Snowflake had nothing to do and nowhere to hurry. She felt more lonely in that noisy sun-drenched street than she had felt in her hole in the cellar. She now thought enviously of her white sisters who had melted the moment they touched the earth—they never learned the meaning of loneliness and they made nobody unhappy... What was she doing here, in the scorching sun, homeless, unnatural and unwanted. Snowflake gave a piteous sigh and leaned against a concrete lamp-post. What was she to do with herself? She raised her eyes heavenwards and a wonderful idea came into her head. She climbed to the top of the lamp-post nimbly and stretched her slender arms to the sky.

“Mother Cloud!” she cried. “Dear Mother Cloud! I have understood! I want to melt, to disappear! Please, listen to me, I’m tired of being all alone!”

But the clouds drifting overhead knew nothing about the lonely snowflake which had not melted and just went on their way in the blueness of the sky.

Getting no response, Snowflake climbed down the lamp-post and again started walking along the street. She had no purpose and was driven by loneliness alone, like a homeless dog. At last she reached a big garden and sank on the ground beside a daisy that was wilting from the heat.

Snowflake clung to the daisy's stalk and burst out crying. Tears flowed from her eyes, and suddenly she felt she was melting, turning into a big transparent drop of water. Then she understood why Mother Cloud had warned her not to cry.

"Thank you! You have saved me, when I was dying from thirst."

It was the daisy thanking her.

The Inquisitive Worm

An angler came to the bank of a lake one morning, carrying several fishing-rods and a spade. Why a spade, you may ask? Because he needed earthworms to bait his hooks. So he started digging.

What a panic this caused underground! Pandemonium broke loose. The worms started digging themselves deeper, to escape the iron spade clinking menacingly against the pebbles. But one young worm was not frightened and made no attempt to get away. He was bored stiff with the monotonous life underground and dreamed of seeing something of the world and cutting a dash in it while he was young and strong. Perhaps the change he craved would come out of this scare? That meant he had to face it bravely. So, while all his brethren were crawling for their lives the young dare-devil made his way to the sound of the clinking spade.

"Are you mad?" one old experienced worm tried to reason with him. "Where d'you think you're going? It's certain death! Turn back before it's too late!"

But the brave young worm disregarded the warning and crawled on towards the sound of the spade crunching into the soil.

"Brothers, help!" he heard a weak cry. "I can't move a ring. I'm paralysed with fear!"

"Oooo!" howled other worms, who had got scooped up by the spade. "We're done for! It's the end!"

But the young worm went on crawling ahead until he reached the blade of the spade and felt two strong fingers smelling of tobacco pull him into the light of day. Then they dropped him into a tin, where several dozen other captives were squirming and tossing as on a hot frying-pan. And they all screamed with terror and yelled for help, so the noise was frightful. But who could possibly help them?

Then followed a further horror: the thick fingers began to dip into the tin and fish out one worm after another. The poor victims were stuck onto hooks and with the last shout of farewell went—plop!—into the water. And that was the last anybody ever heard of them.

Our hero's turn to leave the tin came. He never gave a squeak when the angler's fingers gripped him and stuck a hook into his back. Of course it hurt, but the brave worm was prepared to bear pain for the sake of change and adventure.

The line whistled through the air, the worm hit the water and then, pulled down by the leaden sinker, began to descend into the mysterious underwater kingdom.

He was deafened by unfamiliar noises and intoxicated with unfamiliar smells. Water soothed his wound with its

cool palm and the pain abated. He could see long water-weeds swaying around, and below, on the bottom, a mussel was crawling unhurriedly humming a song.

"Well, at last I'm seeing the world," the worm said to himself happily and began greeting the inhabitants of the lake:

"Good morning to you all! Glad to meet you!"

Nobody answered him, however, only a mass of bubbles escaped from the mussel, who was so staggered by the worm's cheery shout that it flopped on its side and banged its valves shut.

"It's my first visit here," the worm continued, little concerned about the lack of listeners. "I've never been in such a fascinating place before. You see, I was born in a different environment. Have any of you ever had a chance to visit with us?"

At this point a lively young fish, probably as much of a dare-devil as our brave worm, made bold to swim nearer and ask:

"What environment are you talking about? Where is your home?"

"I'm happy to make your acquaintance," the worm cried delightedly. "Thank you for your interest. My home is under the ground, in a peat bog. We crawl about there in pitch darkness among all sorts of pebbles, roots and larvae."

Several other fish swam over to listen.

"What a strange worm," they said to each other. "Is he perhaps trying to tempt us to swallow the hook?"

"You're wounding my feelings by your suspicion," the worm replied. "I am myself stuck on a hook, and I assure you it hurts terribly and I would not wish my worst enemy to try it. Why should I lure you into a trap? By the way, good

morning, I've forgotten to greet you properly."

"Good morning!" the fishes responded in friendlier tones.

The mussel, which had flopped on its side and shut its valves in fright now recovered and crawled nearer to listen; a crayfish came along backwards, a big bream swam over and a loach, himself very like a big worm, climbed out of silt.

"You're stuck on a hook, yet you don't scream or complain... Why is that?" he asked.

"Why should I complain?" the worm asked in surprise.

"All your kin always scream and lament when they find themselves here."

"Or they faint with fear," the bream added weightily.

"We even have a saying," the first lively fish said, "'Limp as a worm in water!'"

"Well, you see," the worm spoke up for his brethren, "of course they're frightened. We hear such horrors about predatory fish, that..."

He never had a chance to finish. The angler became tired of waiting for a bite and jerked at the rod. The worm found himself dangling in the air. Then the angler swung the line over his head and cast it, worm and sinker, as far as he could reach. This was actually a good thing for the worm, because it gave him a chance to take a breath of fresh air: he had great difficulty in breathing under water.

"Here I'm back!" he shouted happily when he sank to the bottom again. "I have a question to ask you all—aren't you bored swimming about in the water all the time? There isn't even any air to breathe here?"

"Of course we get bored!" the lively fish answered. "I'd give anything for a change of scene. I even tried to jump





out onto the bank once, but I couldn't breathe there and barely made it back."

"We've got so much in common!" the worm cried happily. "I hate monotony too. Can you imagine—I intentionally got into the angler's clutches so as to see something of the world. But I'm a bit disappointed. I feel bad in the water," he complained in a small voice. "I can't breathe here."

The loach, hearing the worm's complaint, shot up to the water's surface, filled its gills with air and, coming back, scattered the air bubbles round the worm.

"Oh thank you! Now I'm feeling much better," the worm said gratefully. "How considerate you all are! Thank you very much!"

He was now surrounded by a biggish crowd of lake-dwellers: several perches, a dozen mussels, a bunch of ruffs and loaches and a swarm of various small fry! Forgetting their quarrels and grudges, they surrounded the earth-dweller and listened to him with bated breath.

"My parents, my parents' parents and the parents of my parents' parents, in short all my forebears," the worm launched on the history of his tribe, "have since time immemorial been digging in the earth. But our legends, which have come down to us through generations, tell us that in times long past worms used to live in the water. It was only hunger and the numerous dangers they had to face that had driven them onto dry land. Do you think it's much fun digging in the earth all the time? It's very dull, I assure you. But it's useful. As we dig our holes, we come upon edible things and thus keep hunger at bay."

"Poor things, you have to work so hard to find something to eat," the lively fish said sympathetically.

"That's nothing, the really terrible thing is to be caught by a mole. Imagine the creature—fat, almost blind and as voracious as they make them. He's gobbled up half of my tribe. Once I myself nearly..."

And again he was unable to finish; the impatient angler jerked the rod again, examined the worm to see if he was still alive, and tossed him back.

"What joy—to come back to friends," the worm thought, sinking once again to the bottom and trying not to think of the bruise he got as he hit the water.

A surprise awaited him there: the crayfish had dug up some fresh silt and made a bed of it for the worm.

"It'll help you breathe," the old crayfish explained, the one who was the first to make the worm's acquaintance. "Silt contains a lot of oxygen, so you won't feel suffocated".

Indeed, the bubbles of life-giving oxygen seemed to breathe new strength into the worm's tortured body.

"Thank you, friends," he said, deeply moved. "I wish I could repay your kindness in some way."

"You haven't finished your story about the mole," the curious mussel reminded him.

"Oh, blast him!" the worm said with a shudder. "And it's not him alone either. The birds aren't any better. After a rainfall, when we cannot breathe underground because of all the water, we have to crawl up, and they come in flocks to peck at us. One has to watch out every second..."

"Birds hunt us too," the fishes said with a sigh. "Especially the ducks and other water-fowl..."

Suddenly they all fled helter-skelter: a huge predatory pike, looking like a long black submarine, was approaching the worm. She was the queen of the lake. Usually at this

the lake were making merry. Even the water-weeds swayed in time, even the slime on the bottom billowed. It was a great occasion indeed. But then they noticed that the pike had disappeared. Why, was she displeased? Did she go to sleep in her hole? But no, there she was swimming back, with something shiny in her mouth. The fishes parted to give way, and the pike said to the worm in solemn tones:

"On behalf of the lake population I am awarding you this medal for your inquiring mind, courtesy, bravery and friendliness!" And she hung the medal onto the hook beside the worm. It was round and shiny, with a hole in the middle.

"Where did she get that medal?" the fishes whispered excitedly.

"It's a relic of my family," the queen explained proudly. "It was my great-grandmother who found the medal on the bottom and put it away. Very many years ago, in ancient times, a great battle was fought on the bank of our lake between Russian warriors and armoured knights who wanted to capture their land and to enslave their children. The invaders were gradually forced onto the ice of the lake and because the knights were so heavy in their armoury, the ice broke under them and they sank to the bottom. It happened many, many years ago..."

"Imagine, ours is an historical lake!" the fishes whispered, more excited than ever. "If it wasn't for the worm, we'd never know."

"The invaders' rusty armour is still lying on the bottom of our lake, under a thick layer of sand and silt," the pike continued, casting a threatening look at the chatterers. "This medal is our family relic. It was passed from generation to generation. This fine worm has taken my

fancy, and I think he deserves the award!"

"Hurrah to the brave worm!" all shouted. "Hurrah!"

Moved by the award and the general approval, the worm bowed and said:

"My deep-felt thanks to you. When I come back home I shall clean this wonderful medal with sand and treasure it as my cherished possession. Once more, thank you from the bottom of my heart!"

It so happened that at that moment an infectious twist tune crashed out of the transistor set, and the dancing was resumed again with new vigour. The lake seemed to boil and seethe with the general merry-making. The old pike got so carried away that it leapt out of the water and gave such a splash with her tail that the lake banks were sprayed as with a shower.

The angler, who had dozed off on the bank, woke up and could hardly believe his eyes—water was bubbling and seething around his float, small fry were whirling frenziedly in the lake like in a boiling cauldron, and a huge pike, the likes of which he had never seen in his life, was lashing its tail. What was happening down there? He pulled out his hook, but all he saw there was a limp worm and a dark copper coin.

"Can't make head or tail of it," the angler muttered. "Perhaps there's something wrong with this worm? Why doesn't anybody give it a bite?"

He pulled the worm and the coin off the hook in annoyance, and tossed the two aside. In their stead he stuck on a new worm, sobbing and wailing in despair.

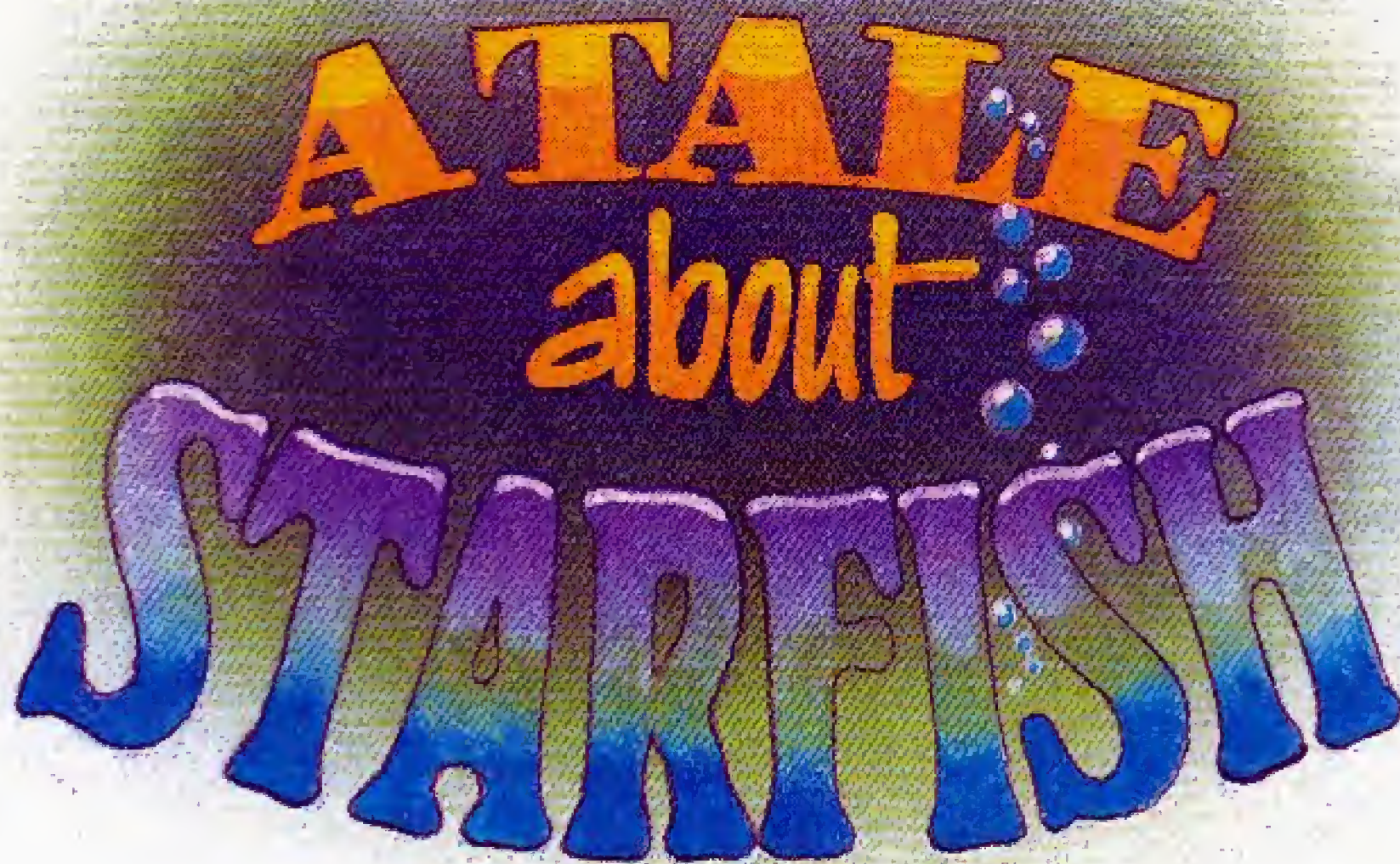
The brave worm flopped into soft damp earth not far from the entrance to his home burrow. The medal dropped beside him. The worm, happy in the knowledge that he was

safe and sound and near home, stretched out on the soft earth, asking the sun to dry his sodden body and to heal his wounds.

From where he lay he could hear the sobbing of his cowardly brethren:

"Oh, how cruel is the world! How unjust to us! On how terrible is our lot! We are dying, we're done for!"

"No," said our hero resolutely, "whatever you say, the world is wonderful!"



A TALE about STARFISH

The sea was so transparent that night and the sky so clear that Starfish, as she lay on the sandy bottom beside a coral reef could see a star sparkling high up in the heaven's vault.

"What is that?" the sea-dweller wondered. "It could easily be my twin sister. I know, it's a star! It shines high in the sky, travels about in the vastness of space and here on earth it is seen and admired by everybody... Now, I'm a star too. But nobody can see me, nobody admires me, and I drag a wretched existence on the bottom of the bay. Is that fair?"

Starfish became so sick with envy and self-pity, that tears poured from her eyes and the sea became saltier still.

A friend of hers, Sea Urchin, heard her sobs and swam over to find out what was wrong.

"Why are you crying?" he asked. "Has anybody been nasty to you? Shall I tell you how I pricked the walrus in the lip? It's killing!"

But Starfish had no desire to be killed.

"Leave me alone," she said crossly. "I am fed up with your silly stories..."

Put out, Sea Urchin crawled away, and Starfish began climbing the coral reef. It was no easy task, but she pulled herself up stubbornly until she reached the very top of the reef, which was sticking out above the water's surface like a little island. From here the star in the sky looked even more brilliant and magnificent. Starfish was consumed with envy and she burst out sobbing again.

As I said in the beginning of the story, the night was very clear, so clear that the star up in the heavens was able to see the tiny coral island in the sea and Starfish who was weeping bitterly on it.

"What's the matter?" Star asked anxiously. "Why are you crying so loudly that I can hear you up in the sky?"

"I'm crying because I'm sick of everything," Starfish replied. "I'm sick of crawling on the bottom of the sea! I'm sick of Sea Urchin's silly stories! I want to be like you, to sparkle high in the sky and have everybody admire me."

"You want to sparkle in the sky?" Star repeated thoughtfully. "You want to rise up here?"

And she sent a fine ray of blue light down to the coral island. It reached Starfish, tied itself round her, lifted her up and carried her into the celestial expanse.

Starfish stopped crying at once and even broke into a smile. Fancy having such luck! Nobody would believe her if she told them! She swayed at the end of the blue ray as on



a swing, and her heart was bursting with pride. "How unusual my destiny is! No starfish had ever risen so high. I wonder if my sisters can see me from down in the bay. If they do, they must be green with envy! Ha-ha!"

Her vanity satisfied, Starfish began to gaze around her. The sky was very different from their cosy bay, where nothing much ever happened. It spread out without bounds, and there were endless constellations and mysterious nebulae around—one could get lost among them in no time. The longer our traveller gazed around, the more uncomfortable she felt. To be quite frank, this boundless sky was quite frightening. Once a rocky asteroid all but knocked her down, then the fiery tail of a comet racing past almost burned out her eye. Then two stars collided near by with a terrific crash, and their fragments scattered round and bruised Starfish in several places. She yearned to hide in some quiet nook, but there was not a single hollow in the sky where she could rest and collect her wits after all the narrow escapes she had had. She began having doubts about the wisdom of her behaviour. Why had she asked to be taken up into the sky? But how could she have known that the sky was such a fearsome and uncomfortable place? Now she knew that being a star in the sky was not all that exciting. There were innumerable dangers and then—most important—loneliness, infinite loneliness.

Starfish thought wistfully of the cosy bay she had abandoned so foolishly and her home at the foot of the coral reef. She even thought tenderly of her friend Sea Urchin. "Why did I have to be so rude to him?" she thought sadly. "Life was so good and I was so happy at home. What do I want with this silly sky?" And tears poured from her eyes. Perhaps there even was a salty rain on earth.

Starfish felt so bad, so lonely and frightened, that she forgot all her dreams of glory and began shouting for help. Crescent Moon heard her moans and cries and floated nearer.

"What's all this racket about?" he asked sternly. "And anyway, what are you doing in the sky, a little creature like you?"

"It ... it was just an accident..." Starfish stammered. "I want to go home, back to my sea..."

"But how on earth did you get here?" Crescent Moon persisted.

Then Starfish cooked up a story:

"You see, I lived in my wonderful bay and was very happy. I had everything my heart desired. And then one clear night a star saw me on my reef. She saw how happy I was, and she was envious. So she entangled me in her rays and dragged me up here! She dragged me up into the sky and left me to fare for myself. She wants me to perish in this terrible empty place."

"Surely Star could never play a mean trick like that," Crescent Moon said doubtfully. "I've never heard of anything like that happening in our sky."

"Ask Sea Urchin if you don't believe me," the cowardly liar persisted. "He'll tell you it's all true. But help me to get back home, please!" she implored and burst into sobs again.

"All right, I'll help you," Crescent Moon said. "Only stop this bawling!"

He swam over to the blue ray and cut it with his sharp edge.

Without so much as a "thank you", Starfish flopped into the water and hastened to her home at the foot of the reef.

She greeted Sea Urchin, staggered by her sudden reappearance, and lay down to rest at once. After all she had been on a distant and hazardous journey! And since the night remained as clear as before she was again able to see the star shining aloft. Then she saw Crescent Moon sailing across to the star and she realised they must be discussing her, Starfish. Naturally they could not be expected to have any praise for her. A coward and a liar, that is what they must be calling her. And they probably smiled mockingly as they discussed her silly escapade.



A JOKE CONCERT

A dung-beetle with a black shiny back was rummaging in an old rotten tree-stump. Suddenly there was the blare of trumpets. He crawled out and saw a troop of mimic-beetles marching across the glade. Some were trumpeting into rolled leaves, others cried for all to hear:

“Attention everybody! A big concert is to be held this evening under the old mushroom. The soloist is Cicada, winner of numerous awards. No admission after the third bell! Attention, everybody! The only occasion!”

The dung-beetle glanced at the shadow of the tree-stump. It was quite long. That meant evening was near and he had to get ready in a hurry if he did not want to miss the concert. He set about polishing his fore-wings with a shred of soft moss, until they shone so you could see your reflection in them as in a mirror.

When the dung-beetle finally reached the concert hall there was little room left under the cap of the huge

mushroom. The audience included May bugs, ladybirds, chafers, dragonflies, earwigs, capricorn beetles and all manner of insects. Even some water-striders had come all the way from the lake, and that was quite a feat, seeing that their legs were only good for sliding on the water's surface. The weevils brought along pine needles, and the earwigs a dahlia flower to nibble on during the concert. Several spiders, large and small, swung under the roof in suspended seats of their own making. The Admiral butterfly with his spouse was ensconced in the box on a dry oak leaf. Our dung-beetle climbed into the next box occupied by a family of beet-fleas, chucked them out with no ceremony, and, making himself comfortable, turned his gaze on the stage.

The third bell was rung on the bluebell, the fire-flies switched off their lamps under the ceiling, the curtain made of nine spider-webs parted and the wasp, who was to comper the concert, appeared on the stage. Her striped dress was belted so tightly at the waist you feared she might break in two any moment.

"We now begin our concert," she announced. "Song about the Sun. Movements: allegro, grazioso, scherzo, moderato. The audience is requested not to gnaw things during the recital. It is not good manners."

The soloist Cicada, winner of numerous awards, walked out onto the stage. A charming shawl made of dandelion fluff was draped round her shoulders. A choir of cicada choristers arranged themselves behind her. Another moment, and the song began:

*Oh Sun, you are so dazzling bright!
You give us warmth, you give us light!
We worship you, we sing your praise,
We bask in your life-giving blaze.*

And the choir caught up the refrain in their thin voices:

Praise... praise... praise!

The dung-beetle leaned over the railing of his box to look up at the sky: there was no sun. It had already sunk beyond the dark tops of the fir-trees.

*Resplendent is your dancing ray
That lends such glory to the day!*

And the choir seconded:

Day... day... day...

Again the silver voice of the soloist rang out under the mushroom-ceiling:

*Live on, Sun dear!
Shine on, Sun dear!
In brilliance
You know no peer!
We love you, radiant and gay.
To Sun, our heartiest hooray!*

The singer drew out the last note, supported by the choir:

Hooray!.. Hooray!.. Ray... ray...

The applause that crashed out made the cap of the mushroom shake and the spiders' seats rock. Everybody clapped, except our dung-beetle. He sat there scowling, depressed by gloomy thoughts. And when the concert was over and the spectators started home, the dung-beetle went to the singer's dressing-room. He entered it at the exact moment when the green grasshopper bent to kiss Cicada's hand.

"You are charming! Wonderful! Superb!" he exclaimed, shaking his long feelers, and offering the singer, as a sign of appreciation, a fan made of violet petals.

The dung-beetle pushed him aside morosely and rumbled:

"I must talk to you! On an urgent matter!"

"I am at your service," Cicada said pleasantly and offered him a seat. The dung-beetle crawled into the armchair made of an acorn cap.

"To begin with I must admit that you really have a passable voice," he started ponderously in the voice of a beetle who knew his own worth. "Yes, it's a decent enough voice."

"Thank you," the singer said with a smile, fanning herself with the violets' fan.

"Though I must say," the dung-beetle rumbled on, without in any way acknowledging her thanks, "that I've heard better voices. When the cabbage fly and the clothes-moth sang out 'Many happy returns' at my birthday party, half of the guests went deaf—and they're still deaf. That's what I call a strong voice."

The dung-beetle rocked back and forth in his armchair and went on:

"Now, it is my belief that your singing, too, would benefit if you sang of more important things."

"What more important things?" Cicada asked in surprise.

"About things that really shine and blaze," said the dung-beetle. "Look here! You sang about the sun, thanking it for the light and the warmth it gives. And what was the sun doing in the meantime? It hid behind the trees and never took a peep at the singer praising it at the top of her voice. And anyway, what's so wonderful about the sun? At

night, when it's dark and cold, it is never there. On an overcast rainy day, when you need it so much, you never see a single ray. And in winter! What does it do in winter?"

The dung-beetle became so heated that he actually jumped up from his armchair. "In winter it does not care a hoot that we may all die of hunger and cold. In winter it only warms Africa and never once looks our way. I've heard from the stork that it warms Africa the year round, so that they never even have any snow there! That's what kind of benefactor it is, this sun of yours, and you sing glory to it!"

Cicada looked at the sky through the window and said: "Please go on, I've never heard such interesting ideas before."

"Well, then," the flattered dung-beetle went on, "sometimes the sun is here, and sometimes it isn't. Now I am always here, and I shine in daytime and at night, in summer and in winter. And I never hide behind clouds and never run away to Africa. I'm always on the spot, as now: see, the sun has set, but I haven't. And that's the way it always is."

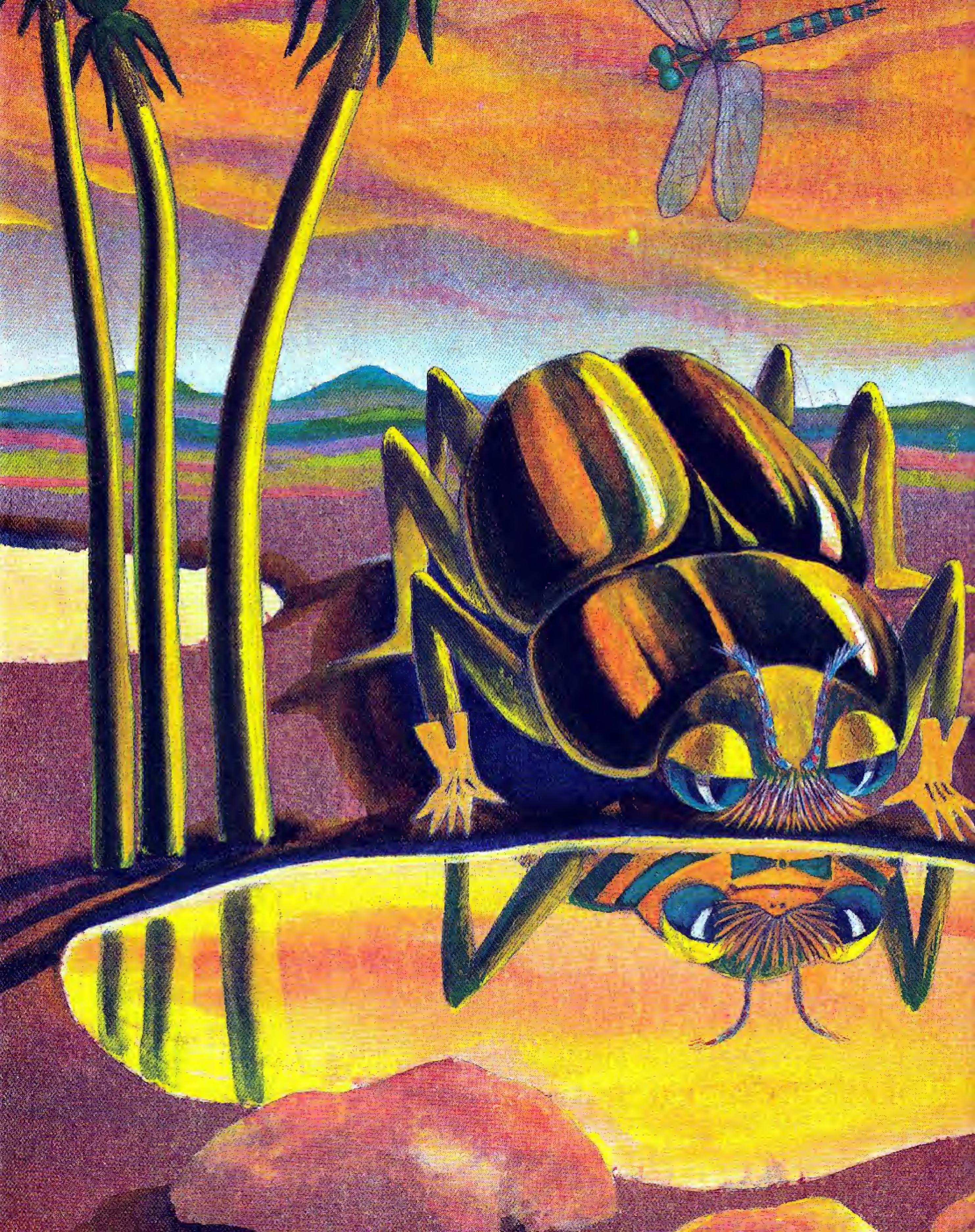
He paused, giving Cicada a chance to answer, and scratched his belly modestly. But the singer merely fingered her necklace made of pods of wild pepper and said nothing.

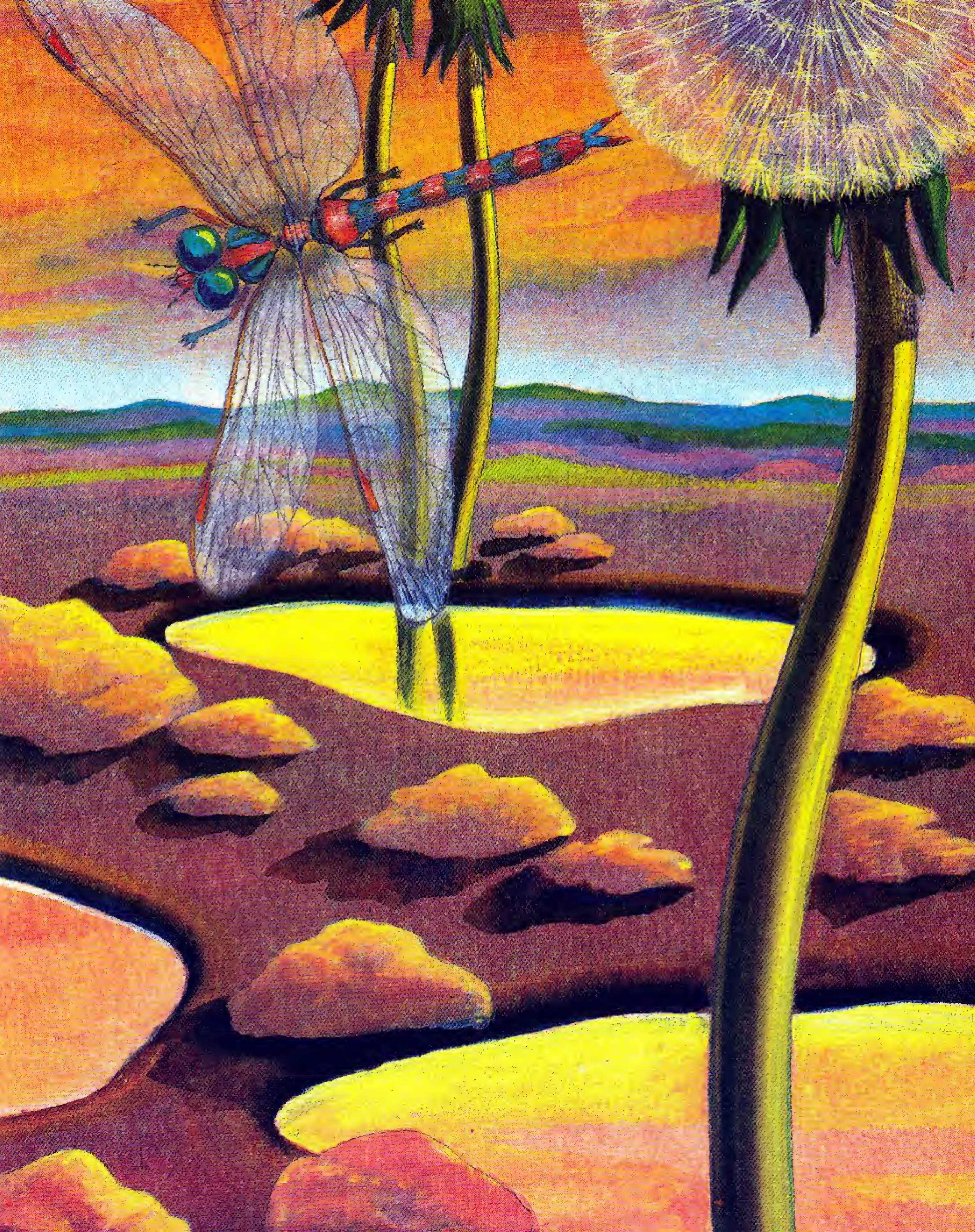
"Well, what do you say?" the dung-beetle finally asked impatiently.

"So you think I should sing about *you* and not about the sun? *You* should be glorified? Is that so?" Cicada asked, covering her mouth with her fan to conceal her smile.

"Exactly!" cried the dung-beetle, jumping up in his excitement. "Indeed, I merit praise far more than the sun. So let them praise me in songs!"

"Very well," said Cicada. "I promise to dedicate tomorrow's concert to you."





The dung-beetle nearly danced with joy. But he took himself in hand, nodded to the singer with an air of importance that befitted one who shone brighter than the sun, and said in farewell:

"I am sure this will be your best concert. I shall send you a bouquet of fragrant flowers, the ones that grow on goat dung and nowhere else! See you at the concert!"

The next day the dung-beetle was on tenterhooks: he kept poking his feelers out of his hole in the tree-stump, listening for the trumpets and looking out for the troop of mimic-beetles. At last they came along, stopped right in front of the tree-stump and announced:

"Tra-ta-ta, too-roo-roo! Attention, everybody. Tonight! Under the old mushroom! An unusual concert will be held! A riddle-concert! All are invited! Remember, chewing things during the performance is strictly forbidden. Tonight! A riddle-concert!"

The dung-beetle tumbled out of his tree-stump and began frantically polishing his fore-wings, legs and feelers. After all this concert was to be in his honour! He made everything as shiny as can be and spent a long time admiring his reflection in a puddle. Never before had he seemed to himself so big, so radiant and so magnificent—he even began to envy himself a little. At last, donning a dragonfly's wing for a neck-tie, he set out for the concert.

He took his former place in the box without even deigning to nod to his neighbour the Admiral and his wife. He turned his back contemptuously on the click-beetle who sat on his other side. Fixing his eyes on the stage, he waited.

At last! The spider-web curtain parted, the lights of the fire-flies went out, and cicada choristers lined up in the depth of the stage.

The tightly-belted wasp came on the stage mincingly and announced:

"A riddle-song: 'Who is Brighter Than the Sun?' Allegro, presto."

The dung-beetle gave a satisfied grunt and, leaning out over the railing, glanced up at the sky. This time the sun was not hiding behind the trees—it, too, was probably curious to find out who was brighter than the sun.

Cicada started singing:

*Who? Who? Who?
In this world
Is more bright
Than the Sun?
Who? Who? Who?
In this world
Gives more light
Than the Sun?
Here is a puzzle!
Give me an answer.*

And the cicada choir chanted the refrain:

*Out with it!
Out with it!
Tell us quick!
Tell us quick!
Who? Who? Who?*

All the spectators started racking their brains: who, indeed, was brighter than the sun? Even the meadow flea stopped jumping about. Even the capricorn beetles stopped stirring their feelers. Even the weevils stopped twitching their long noses. Who could it be?

The dung-beetle could no longer remain sitting but stood up on his hind legs and stretched to his full height so that everybody could see him and solve the riddle. But nobody so much as gave him a glance. All were puzzled.

The dung-beetle became so worked up that he leant over the railing and tickled the click-beetle with his feeler, and then he jerked awkwardly and pushed the Admiral's wife with his hard forewing. The Admiral's wife was so angry that she gave the boor a good whack with her lorgnette. He tumbled out of his box, but just managed to catch at the edge of the dry oak leaf with a hind leg and so hung, head down like a sleeping bat.

Give me an answer!

Cicada urged.

Out with it! Out with it!

The choir seconded.

But nobody could find the answer. It looked as if the riddle would remain unsolved.

The dung-beetle could stand it no longer. Still hanging with his head down, he shouted at the top of his voice:

"It's *me!!* I'm brighter than the sun!"

The spectators were struck dumb.

"I, I am brighter than the sun!" the dung-beetle yelled again.

The click-beetle in the neighbouring box broke out laughing:

"What a joke! So it's a joke-concert!"

And the water-striders chimed in: "We'll split our sides! We'll split our sides!"

"Oh, we'll burst! We'll burst laughing!" the bumble-bees roared.

"What a laugh! We're dying!" the ants groaned.

"Who's brighter than the sun? The dung-beetle! Oh, it's killing," the stag-beetle rumbled.

"We'll knock some sense into his stupid head!" threatened the chafers, the dung-beetle's nearest kin, who did not know where to look for shame.

"Ho-ho-ho!" neighed the unicorn-beetles.

"Hi-hi-hi!" shrieked the fleas.

Even Cicada could no longer keep a straight face and burst out laughing too.

At this point something quite unexpected happened. From all the laughter and the vibrations the old mushroom began to fall apart before everybody's eyes. The thin leg, bored through by various little worms could not stand the strain and broke up, and the big cap, soft as a feather pillow, collapsed on the guffawing gathering. There was a lot of shouting and screaming, but nobody was hurt, and the laughter was not quenched—it broke from beneath the rotten cap and rolled over the wood and fields.

A team of spiders scuttled over and started rescue operations. They swathed the cap in their threads, attached them to a strong cable, threw the cable over a fir branch and pulled. The cap rose in the air. The dung-beetle was the first to scramble out, and he fled. He ran and ran until he was at the other end of the wood. But even there he could hear the bursts of laughter. Furious and exhausted with so much running, the dung-beetle looked up and saw that the sun was also laughing, its cheeks red with merriment.

The dung-beetle clenched a fist and shook it threateningly at the sun:

"Just you wait! I'll have my own back on you yet! It's all your doing—you envy me, that's what!"

And he dived into his hole in the old tree-stump.

THE CHAMPION LOSES OUT

The slopes of the gully were packed full with all kinds of insects—black, russet, golden and speckled. The capricorn beetle, perched on a stone, announced for the whole gully to hear:

“The next to do the high jump is the red-legged click-beetle!”

The gully buzzed and hummed, for it was not simply a gully but an insect stadium, and the capricorn beetle was Chief Referee of the high jump. In the centre of the stadium stood two strong stalks and a thread of a spider’s web was stretched between them. The competitors were jumping over this thread. In the beginning there were more than a hundred of them, but many had been eliminated and the title of champion was now contested by the best of jumpers—the click-beetle, the tiger-beetle, the cicada, the flea and the green grasshopper.

"Come on, Click-beetle!" the Referee said. "The height is two hundred steps of a centipede."

The click-beetle came up to the stalks and—can you imagine it?—lay down under the thread on its back. There he lay, all his six red legs raised in the air.

"Click-click-click," his kinsmen encouraged him from the stands. The high-jump crown was no mean thing to have in the family.

The click-beetle lay on his back and then, as though tossed up by an invisible hand, flew up, his legs still raised. Click-beetles are the only ones of the beetle family who can jump like this. So the click-beetle flew up and turned over in the air, but, unfortunately, caught at the thread with a leg. The thread broke, and the jumper fell on the sand, a loser.

In his chagrin the click-beetle hit the guilty leg with the other five, shouting:

"It's the leg's fault! It's the leg that broke the thread! I'll give you a wallop for it, curse you!"

The stadium laughed watching the click-beetle punishing his own leg, and in the meantime the spiders had woven another thread, the centipede had measured out the height accurately with its small steps, the ants tied the thread between the stalks and the sexton beetles loosened the sand under it to make the landing softer for the jumpers.

The Referee announced:

"The click-beetle has been eliminated. The next is the tiger-beetle!"

The long-legged tiger-beetle had been rubbing his legs together to make them springier, and more supple. Now he came up to the stalks, stopped for a second and patted the amulet on his tummy. He counted on this amulet—the claw of a humming-bird—to bring him luck.

"Come on, tiger!" his fans urged him on.

The tiger-beetle patted his amulet once again and whispered something, probably an incantation that was also supposed to help. It sounded like this: "gyur-gyur, lyur-lyur". Then he spat on his feet, took a run, and ... stopped short just as he reached the stalks. Had it been a bad run-up? He went back to the starting position, again patted the amulet, again mumbled his "gyur-gyur", again took the run—now!—and again stopped in his tracks. His big eyes had become even bigger from excitement, his green tummy throbbed, his front legs continued to pat the amulet that was to bring him luck... He took another run, but stopped again. No, he could not do the jump.

"What's the matter now?" the capricorn beetle asked. A veteran referee, he had never seen anything like it.

"The tiger-beetle is afraid! The tiger-beetle is a coward!" the stadium chanted in indignation.

"Come on, jump!" shouted the other tiger-beetles. "You're disgracing our whole family!"

"I will, I'll jump come what may," the tiger-beetle promised, patted the amulet again, muttered the incantation, took a run ... and again stopped short, paralysed with fear.

After he made the fiftieth run and stopped the fiftieth time, the Referee lost his patience and stamped a foot:

"Off with you! Enough! You're eliminated!"

The coward, accompanied by the hooting and jeering of the stadium, walked away despondently, tore away the amulet and flung it against the ground. And then—can you imagine it?—he made a mighty leap all across the gully and hid in the meadow.

"The fool!" his fans grumbled. "Look how he can jump!"



The Referee, meantime, announced:

"The next is the cicada!"

The cicada soared up, reached the thread, but—alas!—caught at it and the fine thread naturally broke. The cicada flopped down in the sand, dangled her legs in the air in her disappointment and chirred piteously: "Trrrragedy!"

The spiders had already woven another thread and given it to the ants, the centipede had measured out the needed height, the sexton beetles loosened the sand underneath—and the cicada was still dangling her legs in the air and chirring, "Trrrragedy! Trrrragedy!"

"Please, leave the high-jump sector! You are hindering the other competitors," the Referee said to her sternly.

"Trrrragedy!" the cicada sobbed.

"Hey, sister, if you're such a poor jumper, at least let the others do their bit!" the other cicadas rebuked her from the gully slope.

"Trrrragedy!" the cicada persisted.

"Carry her away!" the Referee ordered.

Some horseflies ran over, laid the sobbing cicada on a dry leaf and pulled her away from the stadium like a sack of chaff.

"The next is the flea!" the Referee announced.

The tiny flea, no bigger than a poppy seed, made ready underneath the thread. She squatted and then, as though propelled by a spring, jumped high into the air and cleared the thread. What a feat!

For a moment the stadium was quiet—everybody was speechless with surprise. Who could have thought the tiny flea could jump so high? The first to recover were the flea-fans.

"Eeeeeee!" they squealed in their tiny voices, jumping up and down in excitement. "Eeeeeee! Hurray to the flea!"

“Well done!” the stadium agreed.

The flea rose from the sand and looked round her proudly. Her feeler was lifted high with conceit. She’d shown them all! Now they all knew who could jump the highest. Now that she was the champion, they must worship the ground she walked on.

But wasn’t her joy premature? The competition was not over. There was yet another competitor—the green grasshopper. The flea went white: he must fail! She must be the champion!

When the green grasshopper took his position in the high-jump sector, the flea began to mumble an incantation:

“Peg-meg-deg—I wish you broke your leg!”

The Referee announced:

“The green grasshopper jumps now!”

Frankly, nobody doubted for a moment that the grasshopper will become champion—he had such long legs, he jumped so easily and so beautifully! The athlete took a deep breath, held the skirts of his green frock-coat, took a run, pushed off and, like the wind, swept high above the thread... But what was that? Oh, how unfortunate! One of the skirts of his frock-coat slipped out of his grasp and caught at the thread, breaking it. Defeat!

“Oh-oh-oh!” the grasshopper’s fans wailed.

“Hurrraaay!” squealed the flea happily. “I’m champion!”

The grasshopper rose from the sand, shook himself and, though certainly disappointed, thanked the Referee politely, as well as the spiders, the centipede, the ants and the sexton beetles for their fine organisational work. Then he came up to the flea and congratulated her. But the flea, all puffed up with her new sense of importance, pretended not to see the hand he had offered her in all sincerity. Wasn’t she high and mighty!

Not put out in the least, the grasshopper gave a broad smile to the stadium, got out his fiddle and started playing it and singing a jolly song:

*We won't shed bitter tears and sob,
But laugh and play gay music!
If you are out to reach the top,
Don't be afraid of losing!*

The grasshopper's song was so merry and heart-lifting, that all the fans, the Referee himself, even the flea detachment followed him out of the stadium, catching up the refrain:

*If you are out to reach the top,
Don't be afraid of losing!*

The champion flea looked around her. Why, what was happening? The stadium was empty. The fans left the conceited champion and followed the grasshopper happily, dancing and singing to his music. The flea waited a little, hoping that at least her relatives, the fleas, would remember her and return to pay her tribute, to shower her with praise, to lift her up and bear her home in triumph. But nobody came back. She could just hear the grasshopper's song carried by the wind from far away now:

*If you are out to reach the top,
Don't be afraid of losing!*

"May you all rot in hell," the flea swore in fury. "May you all break your legs!"

But the happy insects were too far away to hear her curses, and they went on singing:

*If you are out to reach the top
Don't be afraid of losing!*

The Plucky Grasshopper

The green grasshopper had the worst of luck: a boy crept up to him when he was taking a nap after lunch under a dandelion leaf and seized him by his big hind leg. Not yet fully awake, the grasshopper gave a mighty yank, trying to free himself—and the leg broke off. He then tried to escape on his remaining legs, but he could not jump, and the boy caught him and took him home. There he put him under an overturned tea-glass, shoved some grass and bread crumbs underneath and left the grasshopper on the window-sill, a live toy.

That night the grasshopper had a dream. He dreamt of the high-jump competition at the stadium, and in his dream he was very lucky. Not only did he jump over the thread stretched between two stalks, but he even jumped over a tall pine-tree and would probably have jumped right into the sky if he was not wakened by terrible pain. And then he

remembered that he was in a glass prison... It was morning. He beat desperately against the glass wall, but it was quite hopeless. His wound began to hurt even more, that was all. Exhausted and miserable, the grasshopper dropped on his grass bed and watched sadly the peony bush outside the window, where bees were buzzing and a caterpillar was dangling on a long thread. How lucky they all were, free and healthy!

He nearly broke into tears from envy and grief, but at that moment a fat fly alighted on the glass roof of his prison. She scratched her fat belly, full of nice food, saw the grasshopper and stared at him with curiosity. She circled the glass several times and her belly started shaking with laughter.

"Girls!" she cried to the other flies. "Buzz-z-z over here! It's amazz-zing! They got the s-s-snooty fiddler in that glass-s! I'll s-s-split laughing!"

A swarm of flies, big and small, descended on the glass and started baiting the poor grasshopper:

"S-s-serves you right, s-s-serves you right—had too eas-s-sy a life, had too eas-s-sy a life!"

And the first, biggest fly buzzed mockingly in sugary tones:

"How d'you like this-s-s fine glas-s-sy new hous-s-se of yours-s-s?"

"It's first-rate!" the grasshopper answered jauntily. "I'm warm and snug and safe. There's no rain or snow or wind, I can see everything and everybody. I have plenty to eat and a soft bed. It's like having a palace all to yourself!"

"What is he s-s-saying?" the other flies, who had not heard him, asked. "Telling his s-s-sad tale, is he?"

And the big-bellied fly asked maliciously:

"And I s-s-suppose you like it having one leg s-s-snipped off too?"

"Oh the leg!" the grasshopper waved carelessly. "I twisted it. And while it's being mended, I've been placed in this light and clean ward to make sure no sloven of a fly dirtied my wound."

"Lis-s-sten to him talk," the flies buzzed offendedly. But they believed the grasshopper and raised a hue and cry: "Why does he have everything and we have nothing? A palace of a ward, if you pleas-s-se! Having his leg s-s-sent for repairs! And calling us s-s-slovens, too! What ins-s-solence!"

The fleas began spitting at the glass in their fury, but suddenly the whole gang rose and rushed away: a garden spider, curious to know what the buzzing was about, came down from the ceiling riding a long thread.

For a long time he regarded the grasshopper in silence, unable to figure out what he was doing under that glass. Meanwhile the grasshopper took out his fiddle and began playing a merry polka.

"Why all this noise? What's this music about?" the spider finally asked. "What are you celebrating?"

"I have cause for celebration," the grasshopper explained politely. "I have been awarded the title of Merited Musician and given this transparent concert-hall for my own special use. Surely it's a grand occasion!"

"I suppose so," the spider said in perplexity. "And why doesn't your right leg take part in the celebration?"

"You see," the grasshopper said with a smile, "so many music-lovers came to congratulate me on my high award, and they all shook my right leg so heartily, that it became all bruised. Now it's being treated in a traumatic hospital and I shall soon have it back as good as new."





"Is that so?" the spider said now rising, now squatting on his long legs. "Is that so? I wouldn't mind having my leg shaken until it got bruised, even two legs, or three, if they awarded me the title of Merited Weaver... But nobody has ever thought of it, nobody appreciates my work!"

And the spider climbed up his thread to the ceiling, very sore about the lack of appreciation, and went on weaving his web and grumbling under his breath.

The grasshopper remained alone again, but not for long. His next visitor was the cabbage butterfly. Seeing the grasshopper so badly mutilated and imprisoned in a glass, she gasped with horror:

"Oh, oh! How terrible!" She even covered her eyes with a handkerchief to protect her sensibilities from the sight of so much suffering. "Horrible! Monstrous! What an irreparable misfortune!"

"Why, what's wrong?" the grasshopper asked, pretending to be surprised. "Why are you groaning like this? Are you ill? You don't look too good to me. You're yellow all over. Something must be wrong with your liver."

"What, am I yellow? Really? I must have yellow jaundice! Oh, oh!"

"You do look under the weather," the grasshopper said sympathetically. "Seedy, I'd say."

Now the cabbage butterfly had no sense of humour at all and became alarmed. If there was one thing she valued, it was her health.

"Seedy? Do I look seedy? Oh, how terrible!" she said in panic. "It's true, I haven't been feeling too well lately. It must be because of my diet of cabbage. Tough cabbage day in day out—is that proper food? It must've given me cirrhosis of the liver. I'd better fly home, take some medicine and lie down. Oh, why am I so unlucky? Nothing

but trouble, nothing but illness!" She pressed her handkerchief to her eyes again. "Excuse me, but I really can't stay. I must find a doctor at once..."

The butterfly flew off moaning and groaning, and the grasshopper just shook his head sadly: all these spiders and butterflies simply did not know how lucky they were, free and healthy. From under his glass he looked out of the window. A swallow flew past low over the ground, two turkey-cocks were quarrelling in the yard shaking their crimson beards, and a centipede was tripping nimbly up the window frame, her legs flashing so fast it made you dizzy. She caught sight of the crippled grasshopper and stood stock-still and stared. Then she shook her head.

With a sad smile the grasshopper looked at her numberless nimble legs and suddenly he felt he could not pretend any longer, could not tell jolly fibs about his misfortune. Tears welled up in his eyes... How unjust Nature was, he thought bitterly, giving some a hundred legs and others so few that the loss of one makes you a cripple.

The centipede gazed at the grasshopper with her wise eyes, and she knew exactly how he felt. She was heartily sorry for him.

"So what if I have a hundred legs," she said. "Even a chicken can outrace me. Of course Mother Nature gave us all a different number of legs, but each of us has only one heart. And yours, grasshopper, is so brave and staunch that no number of healthy legs can make up for it!"

"Thank you for your kindness, sister," the grasshopper said, deeply moved. "You've given me back my strength and hope."

He wiped away his tears, took out his fiddle and there, in his glass prison, composed a merry song:

*My house of glass
Is warm and snug,
I have my fiddle—
I scorn bad luck.*

*In sunshine bright
With gold it shimmers,
Whitewashed at night
In moonlight silver...*



CAT ON THE ROOF

The cat by the name Scat was dashing back and forth among TV aerials on the flat roof of a twelve-storey apartment house, unable to believe that he had really got himself into such a fix. It all began like this. About an hour ago, when the cat was having a cosy snooze on the landing of the twelfth storey, a TV repairsman arrived in the lift. He climbed up an iron ladder to the trap-door in the ceiling, unlocked it and got out onto the roof. Scat had never been on the roof before and he was curious to see what it was like there. So he climbed the ladder too and jumped out through the trap-door. The repairsman, busy fixing an aerial, did not see the cat, or if he did, he forgot about him at once. Scat, meantime, gazed spell-bound at the city spreading below. Gosh, what a sight! How big the world was! It was really something! While Scat gaped, open-mouthed, while he chased off a couple of cooing pigeons

and twirled his whiskers showing off before his pal Tim, the mongrel dog, whom he saw trotting across the yard below, the repairsman finished his job and left the roof. Hearing the trap-door bang shut, the cat dashed across the roof in a panic, but it was too late.

He was all alone on a wide roof, as big as the yard below, with nothing to relieve the flatness except TV aerials and ventilation pipes. To give Scat his due, he was not seriously alarmed at first. In fact he was rather thrilled at the prospect of such an interesting adventure. He imagined himself telling all about it to Tim and the local cats when he came back. "Nothing to worry about," he comforted himself, "as Grandad used to say, when there is a will there is a way."

The sun was shining nicely, the roof was as warm as a village stove, the pleasant smell of asphalt tickled his nostrils, and Scat stretched himself out in the sun and fell asleep. He had a dream the likes of which he had never had before, and he did not think his Grandad had either. Just to have a dream like that was worth climbing on the roof of a hundred-storey building, to say nothing of mere twelve storeys.

This is what Scat dreamt about. He saw himself lying stretched out not on a roof but on a cloud covered with thick Arabian carpets whose ends hung over the edge of the cloud and reached all the way to the ground. Now a carriage was rolling up this carpetway into which were harnessed sixteen white mice. On the box sat Beatrice the Rat, with artificial eyelashes she had stolen somewhere stuck on to one of her eyelids. She kept waving about her bare tail as a whip, giving a crack with it now and then, and the white mice trotted briskly. At last the carriage was on the cloud and stopped beside Scat the Cat. Beatrice opened

the door and produced from inside a hat with an ostrich feather and a pair of morocco top boots—exactly the kind Scat had once seen Puss-in-Boots wear in a coloured picture. And all this finery was for him, Scat. Beatrice offered him the hat respectfully, he pulled on the boots, and got into the carriage, which sported a golden coat-of-arms. The rat's tail swished through the air and the carriage rolled down the carpetway at full tilt. All city cats, dogs, crows and sparrows watched him arrive in this grand style. Scat leaned out of the window of the carriage, took a handful of pork cracklings and scattered them among the crowd. The scramble that followed! The cat smiled in his sleep, it was so funny, and ... awoke. He stretched pleasurablely and was about to start washing his face when he suddenly remembered what happened to him. The sun was already setting beyond the distant horizon, the roof had cooled off and Scat's heart sank. He ran over to the trap-door—perhaps they had opened it?—but it was securely closed. To make things worse, he was beginning to feel hungry, and the roof, as can be easily imagined, is not a place stocked with food. Of course he might try catching some fat clumsy pigeon, but the pigeons, aware of the new danger, had all flown to the neighbouring roofs, and feeling quite safe, now sat there watching the luckless cat.

Scat crawled to the edge of the roof and looked down. My, what a drop! He even felt dizzy. The yard below was dark and deserted, but right under the roof he could see the lighted windows of the top storey. Should he risk jumping down onto the roofed balcony? But no, the hope of catching at the railing was slim indeed, and the alternative was being dashed to death on the asphalt below.

“Miaow!” Scat yowled, hoping that people in one of the flats might come to his rescue.

Indeed, he could hear a door open and somebody walk out onto the balcony.

"Miaow! Miaow!" Scat howled for all he was worth.

"Stop that racket, you blasted creature!" a man's voice shouted from the balcony. "Scat!"

And the door was banged shut.

Scat crawled away from the edge of the roof feeling so dispirited he could cry. He looked at the aerials and a very bold idea came into his head: if he managed to topple an aerial, the TV sets wouldn't show anything and they'd send a repairsman to fix it again. Scat took a run and hurtled himself against an aerial. The aerial never wavered, but the shoulder the cat hit against its iron rod was bruised so badly that Scat writhed in pain and spitted angrily. Then he tried a different approach, pressing on an aerial with the weight of his body, but the aerial was too sturdy for him.

"Nothing doing," he said sadly and heaved a heavy sigh.

Scat spent the night shivering all over with cold, and no nice dreams relieved his misery. Whenever he closed his eyes, he saw the juicy cracklings he had tossed out of the carriage windows in his dream... So he tossed and cowered until at last it began to grow light. The sun rose, and the cat felt heartened. The warmth gave him new courage. He must continue looking for a way out. He crept up to the edge of the roof again. Tim was out for his morning walk. He raised his eyes and saw Scat leaning over the edge of the roof.

"Hey!" Tim said in surprise. "What are you doing up there? Come on down! Or are there a lot of mice on the roof?" he asked with a grin.

"I've been assigned to watch the TV aerials," Scat explained importantly. "They give me a turkey drumstick every evening for this work."

"A whole turkey drumstick? Then why do you look so skinny?" the dog asked.

"Who said I look skinny? There must be something wrong with your eyes!" Scat snapped. "Get yourself a pair of glasses if you can't see as far as the twelfth storey!"

To this Tim made no reply but went inside and came back with the chicken bone he had hoarded up the evening before. He lay down and started on his breakfast. High up on the roof Scat felt the lovely chicken smell and heard the crunching. All went green before his eyes: he was simply sick with hunger.

"Come on down!" the dog called to him good-naturedly. "I'll let you have a bit."

"I mustn't!" the cat answered importantly. "I promised never to let these aerials out of my sight!"

Of course, he could have confided in Tim, telling him he was in trouble, but what earthly use would that be? The dog could not help him and would only go and tell all the local dogs and cats about the pretty pickle the cat had landed in. Scat could just imagine their jeering. So he crawled away from the roof's edge—what was the point of tormenting himself with the tantalizing smell of the bone?—and plodded to the other side of the roof. There were some wires stretched there, and a band of sparrows were perched on them chattering nineteen to the dozen. The cat wanted to slink away before they noticed him in his present sorry state, but one sparrow saw him and started chirping at the top of his voice:

"Chaps, cheer the cheeky Whiskers! He can't get down from the roof!"

"Cheeky Whiskers needs some teaching!" the sparrows chirruped, and the wiring swayed as they hopped and twittered gleefully. The next moment a self-appointed

band-conductor waved his wings, and an amateur choir of sparrows started on a gay tease-song:

*Isn't Scat the Cat a goof,
Getting lost on a wide flat roof?
Door is locked and there's no food—
Would he like a parachute?*

Tim, a loyal friend, stood up for Scat:

"Stop that silly twitter! Scat has been assigned to important guard duty. He guards the aerals and is paid in turkey drumsticks."

The sparrow choir came out with another verse:

*Scat the Cat is aerial guard,
And his job is pretty hard:
Never sleeps a wink at night
Lest the aerals take flight!*

So passed the second day of Scat's misadventures. To make matters worse, towards evening clouds gathered overhead, then lightning flashed and thunder crashed. A great downpour began, and poor Scat had no shelter at all. By the time the rain ended he was more dead than alive, a shivering wet rag of a cat.

"So much for Grandad's 'When there is a will, there is a way'," he was thinking miserably. "I'd like to see him in my place. Even Puss-in-Boots himself would be flummoxed!"

By morning the sky cleared, the sun poured warm rays down and quickly dried both the roof and Scat's coat. But the cat was so weakened by hunger that he could barely drag his feet. He felt like a rubber ball from which all the air has escaped. At noon he heard Tim barking below, asking how he was coping with his important guard duty and if the turkey drumstick was big and juicy. Scat did not even poke

his nose over the edge of the roof—why waste the last of his strength when all was up with him? So he just lay there, watching a big raven, who had flown up to the roof to have a thorough clean-up. He looked fat and lazy.

“If only I could have his wings,” Scat thought longingly, and suddenly a brilliant idea occurred to him.

He rose, his legs trembling with weakness, and, looking away from the raven as if he had not the least interest in the bird, stole in his direction. The raven looked at him indifferently with one eye and went on cleaning his beak. What had he to fear? He could knock that tottering cat silly with one rap of his beak.

Scat stopped a couple of feet away from the bird and sat on his haunches near the edge of the roof. He made a point of not looking at the raven, but his alert ears followed every movement of the bird: now he was finished with the beak, now he shook out his wings, now he sharpened his claws. At last the raven was ready to fly. He gave a short caw, obviously in reply to a call from another raven, stretched out his neck, spread out his wings, and...

Just as the raven pushed himself off the roof, Scat, mustering all his remaining strength, made a great leap and landed on the raven's back. Taken by surprise, the big black bird almost toppled over, but he managed to keep his balance and, weighed down by the cat, glided down to the ground. Of course, had the cat been the huge fat Scat of old, the raven would have just dropped down like a stone and they would both have been dashed to death. But in the two days of being marooned on the roof the cat had lost half his weight, and so the raven managed to bring him down safely. When they landed on a patch of grass Scat took to his heels, afraid that the raven might give him a whack with his strong beak.





"Cor!" the raven muttered dazedly. "Cor!" he repeated unable to think of anything else to say.

Crows flew down to him from the roofs.

"What's happened?" they asked. "Did that cat attack you?"

"Not at all!" the raven said hastily, not wanting to look silly in the neighbours' eyes. "Nothing of the sort!"

"Then what happened?" they persisted.

"Nothing really," the raven said, hastily thinking up a fib. "I saw that cat on the roof, and I thought I'd catch him and serve my pals for dinner. It's my birthday today, you know. Well, I got him by the scruff of his neck and carried him off, but he proved to be too heavy. So I had to drop him..."

"Aren't you brave!" the crows said admiringly. "Catching a cat by the scruff of his neck!"

At that time Scat was already under the staircase gobbling up the chicken bone Tim had given him.

"Is your guard duty over?" the dog asked deferentially. He was surprised to find his friend so hungry. "Was turkey meat nice?"

"It was no good at all! It was dry and even burnt, and there was pepper sprinkled on it. I refused to eat it," the cat replied. "Anyway I got fed up with guarding those aerials. I haven't got a set of my own, so why should I bother? Not my cup of tea at all. So I mounted my raven and flew off the roof."

"You did!" The dog just gaped.

Later, after he had emptied a saucer of milk, Scat sprawled comfortably on his bed in the corner of the landing and said thoughtfully:

"My Grandad was right after all: when there is a will, there is a way."



THE FOAL'S REVENGE

A mare was grazing in a meadow by the motorway, and beside her a slim-legged foal was romping about.

Trucks, buses and cars were tearing along the motorway, motorcycles overtook them at crazy speeds, and along the roadside bicyclists cautiously pedalled along.

The mare did not pay the slightest attention to the thundering motorway: leaping clumsily because her forelegs were hobbled, she sought out greener tufts of grass that would not be all covered in dust. She kept swishing her tail to beat off the bothersome gadflies. But the foal, who was only a month old, watched the rumbling stream of traffic in amazement and delight.

"Isn't she pretty?" he cried at the sight of an orange minibus with a blue band.

"Ooo, what a big one!" he gasped and stood stock-still, gazing with awe at a huge silvery refrigerator truck.

"Mummy, look what a funny doll!" he laughed at a large Volga saloon-car, all festooned with ribbons and with a doll perched on its radiator—a special car for newlyweds.

Once he burst into giggles:

"Look, Mummy, there's a chicken painted on that lorry!"

But his mother, as we know, did not care for cars and never gave them a glance. As a matter of fact, she made a point of having her backside always turned to the motorway—to indicate her disapproval of all cars. And generally, she took a much more sober view of the world than her son. The foal thought the sky was blue and clear, the water cool and sweet, the grass green and appetizing. But his mother felt the tang of detergents in every sip of water, she smelled petrol fumes in every breath and the grass in the meadow tasted of all kinds of chemicals to her. As for the motorway, it got on her nerves with its constant noise and dust; she called all cars stinking iron boxes...

So soon the foal stopped trying to share his discoveries and delights with his mother and made friends with a young brown calf, who would run away from the herd grazing nearby to chat with the frisky foal. He was such fun to be with!

As soon as they were together the two of them started daydreaming.

"Wouldn't it be wonderful to take a ride in that large silvery truck," the foal said.

"I would be afraid," the calf said blinking her white eyelashes. "I might fall out."

"Don't be a chicken! I'd never let that happen," the foal said bravely, shaking his short bristly mane.

"You wouldn't?" the calf said, lowering her eyes. "I'll

go tell Mummy how nice and brave you are."

And she'd run back to the herd, throwing out her hind legs funnily, while the foal cantered to his mother and started watching the motorway again.

"Look!" he once cried in amazement, "there goes a red truck with a ladder on top! What is the ladder for, Mummy?"

"I don't know and don't care," the mare answered crossly without giving the red fire-engine so much as a glance.

"Mummy!" the foal cried on another occasion. "Look, horses!"

A truck with high latticed sides was slowly rolling along, and in its body stood ... horses. Their heads were lowered sadly, there was fear in their eyes, but the foal could not see it.

"Happy journey!" he shouted to them. "Enjoy your trip! How I envy you!"

An old stallion raised his head and gave a neigh in reply, but the foal did not understand his meaning because of the noise the truck made.

"He must've thanked me for my kind wishes," he said to himself, and seeing his friend the brown calf trotting over, cantered gaily towards her.

"Did you see my kinsmen going on a sight-seeing trip?" he shouted. "I wished them a happy journey, and they thanked me. When I grow up I'll go travelling too!"

But this time the calf was not in an agreeable mood.

"Mummy said that these horses are being taken to a slaughter-house and that they will all be killed there," she said spitefully.

"Killed?" the foal asked in dismay, and his radiant eyes clouded.

"Yes, killed," the calf repeated spitefully. "And Mummy also said that soon all horses will be taken to the slaughter-house!"

"It's a lie!" the foal cried indignantly.

"Mummy said," the calf went on relentlessly, "that you horses are no use to anybody, nobody wants you, and that's why you're taken to the slaughter-house. She also said that trucks and tractors do your work now, we cows give sweet milk and nobody can do our work for us. And you horses do not give anything, you just eat our grass and are no earthly use at all."

The foal stood speechless, as though thunderstruck.

"So Mummy said I should not play with you any more," the calf concluded, and haughtily strode off towards the herd.

The foal was deeply hurt and humiliated.

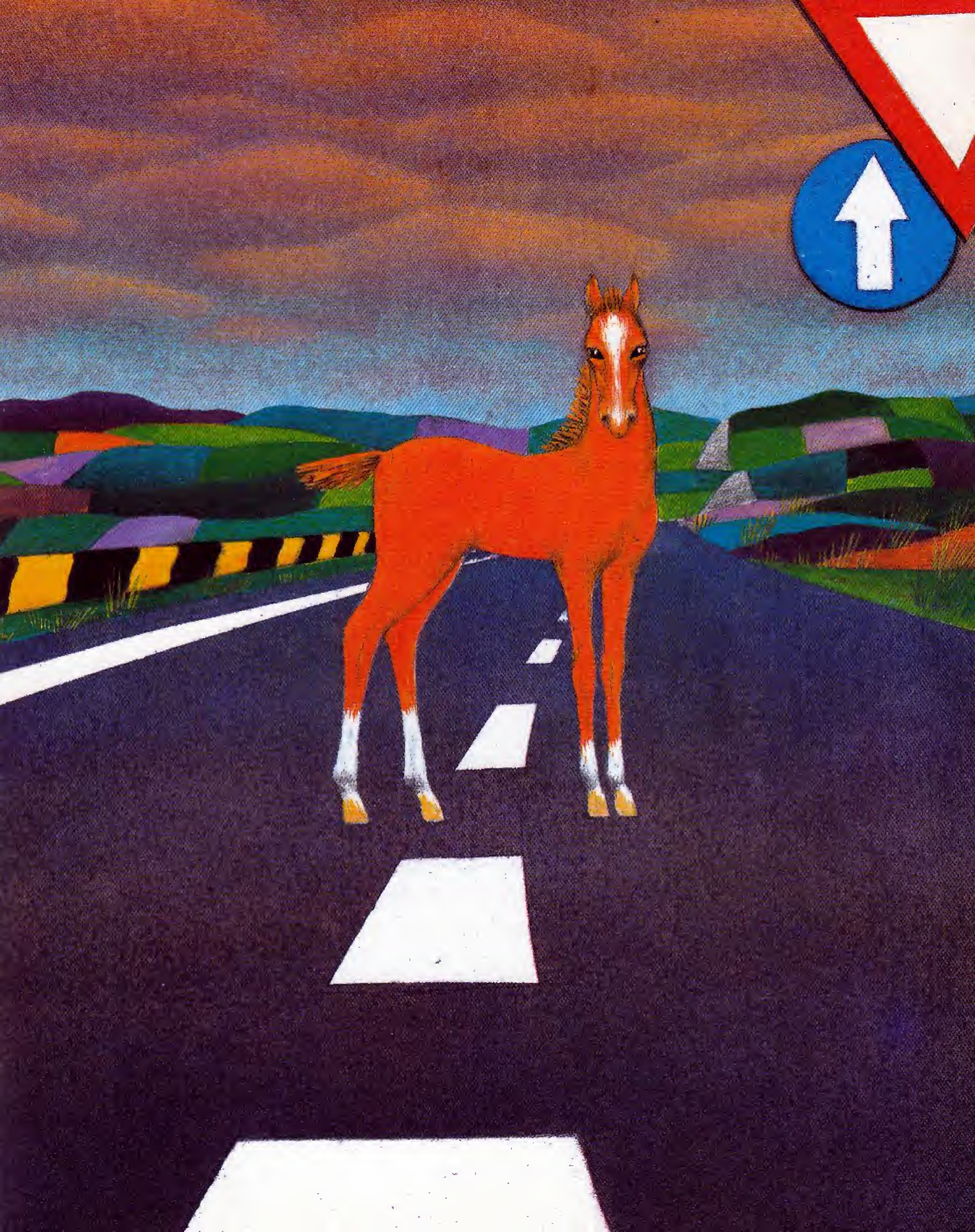
*"Liar lied a load of lies,
Peddled them as cakes and pies,
But no one from liar buys!"*

he shouted after her derisively when he got his breath back, but the calf did not even turn her head.

"*Liar lied a load of lies...*" the foal repeated, but his pure trusting heart was troubled. He ran back to his mother, and nuzzled up against her warm side, seeking consolation and comfort.

"Mummy, is it true that we horses are no longer any use to anybody and that trucks and tractors do our work?" he asked softly.

He hoped that his mother would just laugh and say it was all a pack of lies.



But the mare shook her head sadly and said:

"Yes, it's true."

"And that large truck with high sides, was it really taking those horses to the slaughter-house?"

"Who told you that?" the mare asked.

"The brown calf. And she also said," the foal added with a sob, "that I am no use to anybody either and she will not play with me any more."

The mare looked at her son with love and pity. The harsh realities of life, so suddenly revealed, are a heavy load for a young heart.

Back in the stable that evening, the mare started telling the foal about the glorious past of the horses, recalling their many wonderful exploits.

It made the foal feel much better, and he awoke next morning playful and merry as ever. He rushed over to the herd and ran about it in circles until the haughty calf came up to him.

"And my Mummy said," the foal rattled off, "that we horses have such a wonderful and glorious past as no cow ever had and ever will have. Mother said we took part in great battles, and the names of some horses went down in history, like Bucephalus, the horse of Alexander the Great. And we raced like the wind to bring home news of victory. And Mummy also said that a horse was the most precious gift a king could have and the peasant's trusty friend and breadwinner.

"And Mummy also said that bells were hung on our necks, and we wore morocco saddles embroidered in gold, and that our fast legs saved people when a wolf pack attacked a carriage on the road. And even now, Mummy said, racing horses win medals and the whole world applauds them. And she also said," the foal concluded

triumphantly, "that you cows are lazy big-bellied creatures who can do nothing but moo and chew your cud, and that you let people take your milk away from you and that nothing worthwhile has ever happened in your history. So there!"

For a minute the calf was dazed and could not think of a thing to say. Then she shouted:

"Just you wait! I'll tell Mummy about all the nasty things you said, that we are big-bellied, that we are lazy, that all we can do is moo and chew the cud. Mummy will complain to the bull and he'll give you one in the side with his horns. That'll learn you!"

"Sneak!" the foal said with contempt.

The calf thought a moment and then added:

"Anyway, who cares for your past? All the same your job is done by machines and ours isn't. And if you horses were so brave in the wars, why are you afraid of trucks and tractors, why don't you dare say boo to them?"

The foal had no answer to this one, and just hoofed the ground in chagrin and swished his tail.

The calf went back to the herd and clung to her mother, casting sullen glances at the foal, who hung about a while longer.

Then he turned and trotted back to his mother. The calf's words touched him on the raw. He might get as angry as he liked, but there was a grain of truth in them. The horses *had not* resisted the machines in any way, they did not once make a stand against them. It was very well for his mother to turn her back on the cars rolling by—the cars did not care a hoot.

His young heart was heavy. Suddenly he felt he was responsible for all horses. He did not even complain to his mother about the calf's jeering. He knew now that there

were things one had to decide for himself. He was looking at the stream of traffic with very different eyes. An idea was taking shape in his head. Suddenly he turned resolutely and galloped to the broad asphalt strip.

"Where are you going?" his mother shouted a warning. "It's dangerous there! Come back at once!"

But the foal pretended he had not heard. He jumped over the ditch and stood by the roadside for a while watching the passing vehicles and as though waiting for something. He waited quite a long time, until he sighted in the distance the king of machines—the silvery refrigerator truck. When the truck was quite near, the foal jumped out onto the road stood in the way of the silver giant, his slim legs planted wide apart and his chest thrust out challengingly.

Up in his cabin, the driver saw a foal suddenly appear before his truck, prepared, so it seemed, to attack it. He braked sharply and swung the driving-wheel to the right. The refrigerator truck skidded, drove into the ditch and turned over thunderously.

The huge wheels went on rotating for a while and when they stopped an ominous silence settled on the road. The mare stood petrified with horror, and the herd of cows led by the bull stopped grazing and stared goggle-eyed at the overturned truck that looked like a hay barn a hurricane had thrown on the road.

The foal stood his ground, his four legs planted far apart, but they were now trembling like a hare's tail. He just blinked unable to believe he had this disaster brought about. He might have remained there, rooted to the spot, for a long time, had not other cars started stopping near the overturned truck one after another.

At this point he realised that he had better go while the going was good, galloped back into the meadow and clung to his mother.

The two of them watched people force the cabin door open and the driver crawl out. Luckily he was not hurt, but my! was he angry! Even from a distance they could hear him curse all horses—mares, stallions and foals.

He stared round looking for the culprit and, noticing him beside his mother, snatched a hefty stick and ran towards him.

“Run as fast as you can! Quick!” the mare said to her son and gave him a push with her muzzle. The foal raced off, and the driver, after running after him for a while, realised that it was hopeless and turned back. He got into a car going to the nearby town and went there to telephone for help.

The danger over, the foal ran to the cow herd. The cows and the bull were again grazing and discussing the strange incident on the road. But the calf was barely nibbling at the grass and kept looking for the foal. Catching sight of him, she trotted over at once.

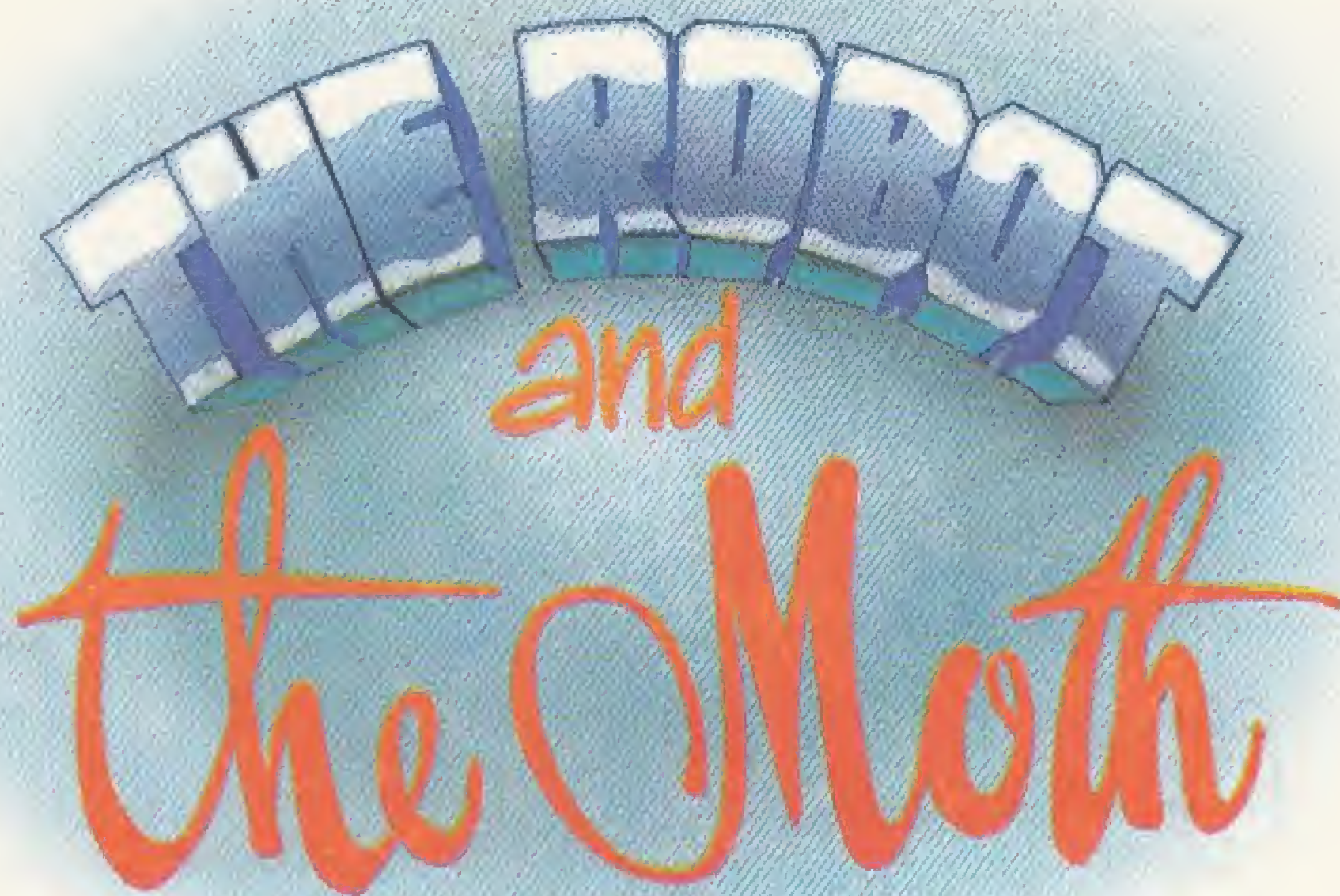
“Mummy says...”

The foal paid no attention. Now that he had escaped punishment and his legs were no longer trembling, he was very proud of himself.

“Mummy says,” the calf went on, “that it was a silly thing to do. You could get killed, and the driver could get killed too...” After a pause, she added: “But I think you’re the bravest foal on earth.”

The foal said nothing. He looked into the distance and in his mind’s eye saw a fast horse carrying its wounded rider from the battlefield... He saw a troika pursued by a wolf pack; he saw horses grazing at night in a meadow to

prepare for a hard day's work; he saw a racing course and steeplechasers straining to the finish line; he saw a peasant horse pulling a heavy plough—he seemed to see the glorious past of the Horse...



THE ROBOT and the Moth

Although the robot stood in the corner of the exhibition hall, he was always surrounded by a crowd. There were plenty of other technological marvels at the exhibition, but the robot was the greatest success of all. Children and adults would come back to him again and again, watching in fascination the clumsy movements of his huge iron arms, his cubic head and his serene orange eye.

The robot could move his arms and turn his head—and he could also answer questions! Not any question, of course, but only those which were listed on a table that was put up on the wall beside him. The visitors would ask him question number one:

“What is your name?”

“My name is Thrum,” the robot answered in a hoarse voice.

“Where were you born?” was the second question.

"I was born in the laboratory."

"What are you doing now?" came the third question.

"Now I am answering some rather banal questions," the robot said and gave a chuckle, "ha-ha".

The people laughed too and then went on with the questions:

"What do you like best of all and what do you dislike?"

"I like best of all lubricating oil, and I dislike ice-cream with apricot jam."

The people laughed again, and glancing at the table, asked the fifth question:

"What is the future of robots?"

"In future robots have wonderful prospects."

"What do you intend to accomplish?"

"I must do everything I've been programmed for."

And then came the final question:

"What would you wish us, visitors to the exhibition?"

"I wish you good health and much happiness!" the robot said and stamped his left foot merrily, which sent vibrations over the floor of the exhibition hall. A new crowd would soon gather and start asking him the same questions all over again. The robot never tired of answering, he laughed in the right places and he gave a stamp of his foot or a wave of his arm also in the right places, and sometimes he even winked mischievously with his orange eye.

"Good boy! He fulfils his programme without a hitch! He does indeed have great prospects," the adults praised him, and the children were so delighted with the robot that they sat down on the floor between his feet and refused to leave.

"Come on, children," the parents urged them, "you've seen all there is to see. Let's go and buy some ice-cream!"

"We don't want ice-cream, we want lubricating oil!" the children declared, imitating the robot, and he gave them a conspiratorial wink with his orange eye and waved his hand in farewell.

At night the exhibition hall became empty and dreary. Thrum stood motionless in his corner, recalling the impressions of the day and the praise of the visitors. He felt very proud of himself—wasn't he a success! He looked down on all the other exhibits, all those machines and automats who never earned anything like the praise he got and were not fit to hold a candle to him, one and all.

A new day would come, the doors would be flung open and new visitors would fill the hall. They asked Thrum the same numbered questions and again admired his answers. Then another night came, and another morning... And so it would have gone on if not for a moth who flew in through the window one night.

She was attracted by Thrum's orange eye, which sparkled very bright in the darkness.

The moth alighted on the robot's shoulder, swept her wing over his glass eye and said with disappointment:

"Oh, what a cold light!"

"It is not a light but my eye," the robot wanted to say, but he could only utter answer No 1:

"My name is Thrum."

"Is it?" the moth said, flattered that this great iron being deigned to talk to her. "And I am a nocturnal moth. My name is Underwing."

"I was born in the laboratory," the robot said his next phrase.

"Laboratory... It must be a very interesting country," Underwing said and twitched her long feeler. "And I was





born on a blossoming chestnut tree. Have you ever seen a chestnut tree in blossom?"

"Now I am answering some rather banal questions, ha-ha!" said the robot.

Underwing was put out and her bright underwings paled.

"Excuse me," she whispered. "Of course I'm not very bright. I only hatched from chrysalis yesterday, and nobody has explained things to me. They only taught me to hide from night birds, and said I must beware of the bats..."

Thrum went on with his programme:

"I like best of all lubricating oil, and I dislike ice-cream with apricot jam."

"And I," Underwing replied, "like best of all to nibble on young leaves of chestnut trees. I never tasted lubricating oil... Would you like a chestnut leaf? I can bring you a piece..."

"Might be a good idea to taste something new," Thrum wanted to say, but out popped the ready-made answer No. 5:

"In future robots have wonderful prospects!"

Again Underwing felt very small indeed.

"You use such long and clever words," she said with a sigh. "I told you that I was cut off from the world in my cramped chrysalis and I am really quite ignorant."

"I must do everything I've been programmed for," Thrum persisted.

"I'm sorry, but it's time I went," Underwing said. "Goodbye, Thrum dear!"

"I wish you good health and much happiness!" Thrum rumbled and stamped his iron foot.

"Thank you," the moth said, patted the robot's cheek with her wing tenderly and flew out of the window.

The robot watched her go from his only orange eye and for a long time felt strangely disturbed.

"She's quite different from the visitors," he was thinking. "An odd one, indeed. She asks questions which aren't in the programme and makes a mess of my answers. And she never praised me once... Still, the touch of her wings is so tender and her voice so sweet... And she called me 'Thrum dear' in parting!" These last thoughts gave him real pleasure.

In fact he became so absorbed in his recollections of the nocturnal meeting and his feelings about Underwing, that he did not hear the doors being opened and a stream of new visitors pouring in. He actually missed the first two questions, and made a hash of the third, giving the answer in the wrong order:

"Ha-ha! Now I am answering some rather banal questions."

"Imagine, he makes fun of us!"

A very important visitor was offended and ran to Chief Engineer to complain about the robot.

But Thrum had by then recovered and had his answers pat. And again he received heaps of praise:

"Good boy! Fulfils his programme to a T! He will accomplish much."

"What a pity Underwing cannot hear this praise," the robot thought with regret. "If she knew how much praise I get she'd admire me all the more! I wonder if she will come tonight... Oh, and what if the bat got hold of her?" His heart contracted—something he had never felt before.

But the moth came.

"I'll just take a breather on your shoulder and fly on," she whispered trustfully. "It's so quiet and restful here!"

A wave of tenderness overflowed the robot's iron chest.

"My name is Thrum," he said.

"I haven't forgotten your name," Underwing said politely. "Have you any brothers or sisters?"

Thrum wanted to tell her that he was all alone in the world, all alone in the exhibition hall and in the whole city, but he could only come up with answer No 2:

"I was born in the laboratory."

"You told me that," the moth reminded him. "Why do you keep repeating the same things? Aren't you tired of them? Well, I'll be going. I'm very hungry. I haven't had a bite yet. That nasty bat keeps hanging near my chestnut tree... Till we meet again, Thrum dear!"

Again she stroked the robot's cheek with her wing tenderly and flew out of the open window. Thrum looked after her a long time, and his eye shone more brilliantly than ever before.

"She will come back!" his iron heart sang. "She likes me, she will come back and settle cosily on my shoulder! I wish this night never ended! Perhaps I will learn to say other words besides those I've been programmed for? I will then thank her for the caress of her wings, and I'll tell her she is my one and only Underwing..."

Thrum's orange eye was fixed on the window impatiently.

And she did come back, but in a strange manner: she darted through the window and threw herself frantically at the robot's iron chest.

"She's after me!" she screamed. "She's after me, Thrum!"

And indeed a black shadow flashed in the window and the next moment the bat was inside.

"Don't let her swallow me!" the moth implored, clinging to the robot's chest. "Beat her off!"

The robot puffed out his chest bravely and wanted to say: "Don't be afraid, I'm the strongest machine at the exhibition, I won't let anybody harm you!"

But instead he said:

"My name is Thrum."

The bat circled the robot and saw the moth clinging to him.

"Save me, Thrum dear!" the moth begged him.

"Get out!" the robot wanted to shout at the bat, but again he said the phrase he was programmed for:

"I was born in the laboratory."

The bat sunk its teeth into the moth, but had not the time to swallow it because the moth dropped to the floor at the robot's feet.

"Oh my wing," she moaned, when the bat, having circled round the robot several times and failing to find her, flew out of the window. "My wing is torn off. Oh Thrum, why didn't you protect me?"

"Now I am answering some rather banal questions," Thrum blurted out, "ha-ha!"

His own answer made him shudder, but he did not know how to say anything else.

The moth was fluttering on the floor, trying to fly up, but she only spun in one place like a spinning top.

"If you only knew how it hurts," she moaned.

"I like best of all lubricating oil, and I dislike ice-cream with apricot jam," Thrum creaked out.

"What did you say?" Underwing gasped, unable to believe her ears. "Aren't you sorry for me at all?"

"In future robots have wonderful prospects," she heard in reply.

"How heartless and cruel you are," Underwing whispered feebly.

"I must do everything I've been programmed for!"

The moth barely stirred now. Once more she lifted her one wing and then lowered it slowly—never to move again.

"Farewell, Thrum dear," she whispered and died.

"I wish you good health and much happiness!" Thrum bellowed and stamped his foot so hard the floor boomed.

Then deathly silence descended on the hall. Underwing lay at Thrum's feet motionless. It was getting light outside. Then the doors were opened, and curious visitors streamed in. Of course they surrounded the robot at once.

"What is your name?" came question No. 1.

"She called me Thrum dear," the robot thought, his heart wrung with grief. "Nobody will ever call me that again."

"Where were you born?" came the second question.

"She said she was born in a chestnut tree... I have never seen a chestnut tree..." The robot was nearly crying.

He did not answer any of the following questions either, he never once lifted an arm or stamped a foot, and he never winked with his orange eye.

Chief Engineer was summoned again. He tapped Thrum's chest, tightened up some screws and said sternly:

"Now, come on, tell me what is the future of robots?"

"Chest...nut..." the robot uttered with difficulty and something snapped inside his chest.

Chief Engineer made a face and said:

"Our robot has broken down... What a pity! He performed his programme so well! We'll try to repair him, and if we can't, he'll go for scrap iron..."

A big white dust-sheet was brought and the robot was covered with it. A notice was put up: "Out of order."

It was as quiet as in a coffin under the dust-sheet. But at night, when the wind flew in from outside bringing with it the fragrance of blossoming chestnut trees and the rustle of their leaves, muffled broken sounds came from under the dust-sheet. It was as though someone was learning to speak:

“Un-der-wing... Chest-nut... It hurts...”

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THE ROAD

AND

the Moth

